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Magazine

Vol. 1

MAY, 1938

No. 1

Complete Action-Mystery Novel

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***Introducing Capt. Hazzard 8**

Short Stories

BOOMERANG BLUFF Clint Douglas 61

This gentleman crook spread sucker bait on a trap at the races.

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Speed Demon Buck stacked his pilot's skill and a home-made crate against another flyer's big mouth and a crack airplane. But Buck was human—and his wings were clipped by the code of the sky.

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In that Balkan hotbed of intrigue were men and women wise in the sly and subtle game of nations. And against them was a hard-boiled American newspaperman, who was looking only for—hot news.

Cover by Norman Saunders

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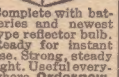
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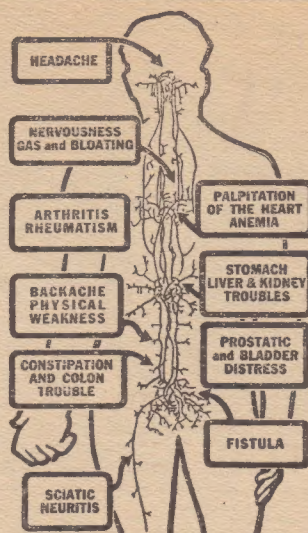
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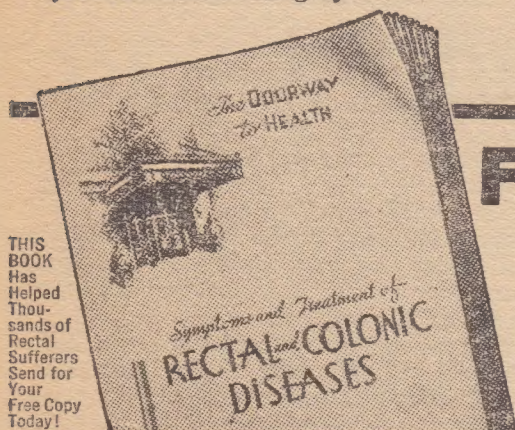
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Introducing — Capt. Hazzard

WHEN I finished writing the chronicle of the "Python Men of Lost City," the editor asked me for a brief word of introduction for this column. To tell the truth, I didn't know just where to begin. For, in the story, I told that Captain Hazzard had been blind for fifteen years of his boyhood; and how he had studied and developed his mental powers far beyond those of an average person; how he had regained his eyesight, and then marshaled a group of assistants—scientists, chemists, mathematicians, adventurers—and flung a challenge to the criminals of the world. So I was at a loss as to how to give you a real insight into the character of this remarkable man—until I remembered what had happened on that glorious day when Hazzard's eyesight was restored to him.

As the doctor unwound the bandages over Hazzard's eyes he warned that the eyes could only be used for three minutes the first day. Young Hazzard reached out and took my arm, saying:

"There are three things I want to see. Will you get them, Hawks?"

I squeezed his arm. In a quiet voice, he made his first request:

"Let me see a picture of my mother and father."

That sorta choked me up. For both of his parents had died while he was blind. He had known and loved them—but had never seen their faces. "You shall see that picture, lad," I said.

His next request was a simple one. Most of you see it every day of your lives. Hazzard's voice had a strange thrill in it when he asked:

"I want to see—the American flag. Those stars, and the red, white and blue must be a beautiful thing to see."

I told him that a person has to look a long way to see a more beautiful thing than Old Glory. And then came his last request:

"The picture of Blind Justice—the lady holding the scales, and with the blindfold over her eyes . . . I want to be her eyes."

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Python Men

A Complete Action-Mystery Novel Introducing "Capt. Hazzard"

By Chester Hawks

A fiery curtain of doom dropped on the first act of the Phoenix's sinister murder spectacle. And that curtain eclipsed the drama of the reptile-skinned stowaway from nowhere. But it was just the first act, for the Phoenix and his barbaric battalions of Python Men were staging a weird welcome in their jungle stronghold for the one man who defied them. That man was Capt. Hazzard—peer of perilous adventure and master of modern science.

CHAPTER I

THE MURDER CURTAIN

THREE MEN stood beside a dusty gray auto at one side of Pier 52, North River, and watched the American liner, *Liberty*, slide into her berth. Their faces mirrored a tenseness mixed with a haunting, brooding dread. Some hidden conflict seemed to be twisting their nerves to springlike tautness. Stark terror of a force outside themselves was lashing them pitilessly to do a thing they feared.

Floodlights bathed the pier as the great ship touched the dock with a rumble of winches, a clatter of gangplanks, a shuffling of feet. White-coated stewards, carrying luggage, were the first to reach the pier. Then came the passengers, smiling, waving, calling excited greetings to friends and loved ones on hand to welcome them home.

But there was no love, no friendship in the eyes of the three men who stood beside that dusty, queer-looking auto.

One was tall, thin-lipped, with a sickly pallor accentuated by blue-black hair. Another had a powerful body, a heavy bloated face. The third was small, swarthy, vicious, his sharp teeth showing in a servile, hyena grin. He wore goggles and a chauffeur's cap.

They made no move to meet anybody. They stared fixedly through the door of the pier shed at the lights of the great liner. Not till all the passengers were off and had passed through customs did the tall, pallid man stoop and whisper something to the one with the bloated face. The heavy man nodded, set off at a fast walk diagonally across the street.

The swarthy chauffeur slipped behind the wheel of the gray car and started the motor. He sat on the front seat with the alertness of a cat waiting to spring. The pallid man climbed into the back and drew the side shades carefully. The car waited, its engine purring.

But something moved on top of it as the man inside slowly cranked a handle. It might have been a collapse

of Lost City



*Fearful, smothered cries
ripped from their throats.*

sible radio aerial. It rose up thinly, forming a low tripod. The handle inside continued to move. From the top of the tripod thin black rods pushed out of tubular metal framework. They were slender, almost invisible to anyone standing more than a few feet away. But they crisscrossed into a design that was horribly like the antennae of some great insect.

There were still finer, hairlike rods branching out from them and these trembled with the vibration of the car's engine, reminiscent of the feelers of a giant deadly centipede getting ready to strike.

The man inside ceased to turn the handle. He crouched forward, staring through a peephole in the side curtains at the big pier entrance. Once he moved to another peephole on the opposite side of the car and glanced intently in the direction that the bloated-faced man had gone.

There was an empty store diagonally across the street here, its windows broken and dusty. Dimly seen on the roof of this building was the rod framework of another small tripod. The hairlike antennae were invisible, but the metal tubes in which they were mounted reflected a faint gleam of light.

The dark-haired man's pallor increased, and his hands trembled. He again took up his station at the peephole nearest the dock. His black eyes held a savage gleam of impending murder.

There was excitement at the top of the *Liberty's* forward gangplank now. Several dapper ship's officers led a strange looking figure forward, a stowaway who had been discovered in one of the holds after the vessel had come through quarantine.

The stowaway's clothing was tat-

tered, stained, his body emaciated. But the most startling thing about him was his face. It had the dry, scaly look of a reptile. All life seemed to have gone from the skin. Brown, dead looking, it was cracked into unsymmetrical sections like the hide of an alligator.

SEVERAL officers kept at a distance from him, as though they feared they might become contaminated. But two immigration men, accustomed to handling all sorts of queer characters, came up and grabbed him by the arms. One said:

"Come along, buddy, we're gonna take you places."

The reptile-faced man made no answer. His dull, glazed eyes were focused on some horror only he could see. He moved sluggishly, letting himself be pulled forward. The few people left on the dock recoiled as he passed, staring with open-eyed amazement.

The immigration officers led him through the pier shed toward the exit. Here another man, short, stocky, keen-faced, pleasant looking, was lingering purposely. He stepped forward as the trio reached him. "My name's Crawley," he said. "Any idea where that chap came from? I picked up a message on the ship-to-shore telephone and heard about the stowaway."

One of the immigration officers waved him back. "You press people give me a pain," he muttered. "Our department will make a report when it's ready."

"The *Liberty* put in at several South American ports," persisted Crawley. "Maybe this man's an escaped prisoner from Devil's Island."

"Yes, and maybe he isn't!" snapped the officer.

Get Acquainted
with
Capt. Hazzard
the Dashing
Ace Adventurer

Crawley shrugged, stepped aside. But he followed at a distance. His own car was parked outside along the block. He had instructions to learn the identity of this strange man who had somehow stowed away on a crack passenger liner.

He was fifty feet behind when the stowaway and the two immigration men passed through the exit. For a moment they were on a line with the gray car parked outside the pier and the metal tripod mounted up there in the darkness on top of the empty store building. Crawley was the first immediate witness of the shocking, extraordinary thing that occurred.

The night gloom outside the pier entrance changed suddenly. It grew lighter, with a wavering, eerie incandescence as though the sky had been fired with the glow of an aurora borealis. Tongues of shimmering, uncanny light slid through the air, wavered, intermingled, touched and retreated, only to reappear again. But they were not in the sky. They were in the air close to the earth—forming a weird, pulsating, radiant curtain between the tripod on top of the gray car and that other tripod on the roof of the building. A curtain of horrible death! For the stowaway with the reptilelike face and the two immigration officers stood paralyzed in this ghastly web of writhing fire.

Muscles strained under their clothing. Veins stood out on their faces, swelled, seemed about to burst like over-ripe grapes. Their eyes started from their heads. Their mouths opened, tongues protruding. Fearful, smothered cries ripped from their quivering throats.

The two immigration officers sagged on legs gone limp as jelly. The

stowaway took two jerky steps forward. He seemed to possess inhuman stamina—for he almost stumbled out of the curtain of light. Then he, too, paused, staggered and dropped.

Crawley did a strange thing for a reporter—a strange thing in the face of that maelstrom of murder. He calmly closed his eyes, seemed to go to sleep. His features looked peaceful, trancelike for a moment. He seemed almost bored by the terror of the night. What went on in his mind made no show in the visible world. But odd systaltic vibrations stirred in the inner, unknown realms of etheric space. Crawley's horror and the image that fell on the retina of his eyes, was

transferred in the flash of a split-second by telepathic influence to the brain of another man ten miles away.



CAPT. HAZZARD

THIS MAN was sitting quietly in an inner chamber of a great building on Long Island. It was a laboratory, a workshop and an airplane hangar. There were high walls of reinforced concrete

around him, electrically charged barbed wire on top of that, and then other walls of steel and hardwood. But Crawley's mental image, his feelings, came through them by telepathic impulse with speed of light.

The man in the quiet laboratory received the same image, the same impressions of horror. His mind, connected by the mysterious bond of extra-sensory impressions, which make up the new science of telepathy and clairvoyance, known collectively as "parapsychology," actually seemed to see through the eyes of Crawley. The impressions came dimly at first, wavering, disturbing, out of a fog apparently, like an image from a projector being focused. Then they were

clear, true, awful as the thing itself. And the man in the laboratory chair sat breathing deeply, gripping the edge of his desk with tense fingers, staring fixedly at the blank wall before him.

His name was Captain Hazzard. He was young, ruggedly built, broad-shouldered, dark-haired, with a face that was a mixture of dynamic youth and mature power. It was hard to place his age. He seemed to be in his middle twenties. He might have been younger or older. There was a changeable quality in his blue-gray eyes as there was about his face. The irises had the clearness of a blue flame, but, when his moods varied, a wind seemed to blow across the flame, and darker glints glowed beneath.

He was a man about whom many legends had sprung up. Many strange stories had been told of his actions, his powers, his career. But hardly any of them as startling as the truth itself.*

In his mind's eye now he saw the stowaway pitch forward. He saw the two immigration men lying in huddled heaps. He saw for an instant, as did Crawley, that one end of that weird curtain of death was somehow

connected with the parked gray car.

He sat stiffly in his chair while the action unfolded, while Crawley, his agent, continued to send out the telepathic impulses that were registering in his own excited brain.

The strange curtain of livid light disappeared as suddenly as it had come. It flashed off, leaving the darkness darker. And in that darkness the grinning chauffeur behind the wheel of the gray car touched levers and the car sped away.

Crawley pointed, cried through trembling lips: "Those men did it!" A policeman heard him, ran for a patrol car. Crawley himself turned and raced for the spot down the street where his own coupé was parked. He swung it around, tore after the gray car that was now only a ghostly blur up the long water-front street.

Captain Hazzard, in his laboratory, grabbed the desk edge still more tightly, as though he himself were driving Crawley's coupé. It gained on the gray car. A police radio cruiser with a powerful motor, nosed up and went by Crawley. It continued to out-pace him, creeping up on the gray car ahead. Crawley stepped on the gas,

* AUTHOR'S NOTE: Captain Hazzard, America's Ace Adventurer, was blinded in infancy and spent the first fifteen years of his life in total darkness. Denied normal pleasures and activities, he had been thrown back on himself, on his own cleverness and imagination. He had learned the Braille system of reading by sense of touch. More than this, in those long dark years when the outer world was beyond his sight, he had developed his latent mental powers to the point where they extended much farther than the average persons. He had studied all the phenomena of the mind; hypnotism, the various schools of psychology, Yoga and other forms of Oriental mysticism including the shamanistic beliefs and practices of the Lamas of Tibet, and telepathy.

When a delicate surgical operation had finally restored his physical sight he had dedicated his life to adventure, action, and the extension of man's knowledge of the world about him. He had gathered together certain chosen assistants, brilliant young scientists, chemists, mathematicians, adventurers. A few hand-picked men he tested for telepathic powers by means of card symbols,

using the method of Doctor Rhine of Duke University. In this way, he had formed a small group of close associates who could send mental messages and images to him, and receive his in turn under certain conditions. The telepathic powers of the mind are not perfect. But some day, when the world is older, Captain Hazzard believes they will be. At present he has learned to make use of many. The common experiences which people everywhere have of telepathy, mind-reading, foresight, and psychic contact, prove that mankind is on the threshold of new and vaster discoveries in the realm of the mind. Captain Hazzard is a pioneer in this great new branch of science.

And his brilliant researches and inventions in his Long Island laboratory, as well as his startling world adventures, have brought him not only wealth and fame, but recognition from his government. For certain secret advice of a military nature, which has helped to make America safe against foreign attack, he has been given the honorary rank of captain in both the army and navy air corps.

hugged the wheel more tightly.

Then Captain Hazzard rose from his chair as an idea struck him. He broke into the telepathic reception he was getting from Crawley, sent out a mental message of his own: "Look back, Crawley! There may be another car behind you. Tripod! Curtain of death!"

The message flashed through etheric space to Crawley's mind. Crawley got it, faintly at first, then more clearly as he felt the powerful brain impulse of Captain Hazzard. He stared back, and his mouth opened.

Captain Hazzard breathed an oath as all went blank in his mind—blank, because Crawley had stopped sending, stopped receiving. Something had gone wrong! It was as though a switch on a radio had been turned off.

THE HAND of Captain Hazzard dropped to an inter-office telephone. He snatched the instrument up, barked a swift order: "Tell Crandall to warm Z2."

He slammed the instrument down. In ten quick strides he crossed and yanked a door open, walked down a short passage and through another door made of case-hardened molybdenum steel. He passed by a glass-partitioned office where absorbed young men were bent over long desks, passed a machine shop where other men were working, and a laboratory where white-coated chemists stood quietly in front of instrument-strewn tables. He crossed a foundry room where the latest scientific electric crucibles were mounted and where molten metal hissed.

Heads lifted as Captain Hazzard's tall, erect figure moved by. Men saluted or nodded in respectful greeting. He was the brains, the heart, the soul of one of the greatest private laboratories in the world. Loved as a close friend by the men around him, his word in this whole, vast, busy building was law.

He walked down another passage, stepped into a small automatic elevator that shot him up to the roof of the plant. The hum of a powerful airplane motor warming up filled the whole night air. The water of Long Island Sound gleamed close at hand. The plane itself was standing on a catapult, such as are mounted on the decks of battle cruisers.

It was a single-seater amphibian with twin pontoons, retractable landing wheels and a giant radial motor of six-hundred horsepower. A grave young man in the cockpit was watching the temperature gage intently. He stepped out, saluted as Captain Hazzard came up.

"She's almost ready, sir," he said.

"Stand by to release me, Crandall,"

Captain Hazzard replied.

He got into the narrow cockpit, adjusted flying helmet and safety belt, watched the temperature gage creep up. In thirty seconds, he raised a gloved hand and Crandall pressed a button. There was a dull explosion, a hiss of compressed gases. The catapult boom swung forward and literally hurled the amphibian out into space away from the roof.

It shot across the water, sailed in a long trajectory, dipping down till the motor burst into a full song of throaty power. Then it lifted, banked, climbed into the night sky on its silver wings and whining steel propeller.

Hazzard made the ten miles to New York's waterfront in exactly three minutes. His plane banked high over the city, shot down like a bolt from the heavens, came to rest on the river close to the stern of the *Liberty*. He taxied into the slip, threw a dockhand a rope, made his plane fast and climbed up a ladder.

Radio police cars were gathered around the three dead men. Cops formed a stalwart human barricade. They bristled when Captain Hazzard pushed through the crowd of curious people that had gathered. Then an in-

Save several cents a pack! Try Avalon Cigarettes! Cellophane wrap. Union made.

spector of detectives recognized him and nodded. The police opened a path to let him through.

The inspector said: "This is a hellish business, Captain Hazzard. Five men have been murdered, and the criminals have got away."

"Five?"

"Yes. These three poor chaps here and two officers in a pursuing radio car. They were knocked out the same way as these fellows. An electric ray or something. A car sneaked up behind them with a tripod gadget on it and lined them in a death zone with the car ahead."

"What about a reporter named Crawley?" asked Hazzard tensely.

"He was trying to follow the killers, too, Captain. He must have got nervous and lost control of his car. He swerved and hit a lamp post. They've taken him to the hospital with a case of concussion. I think he'll pull through all right."

Captain Hazzard breathed more easily. But his face was masklike in its harshness as he looked down at the three dead men. The blueness of his eyes had given way to a wintry gray.

Morgue attendants were preparing to take the bodies off on stretchers. Hazzard looked down at the still figure of the strange stowaway. The police inspector said:

"It'll be hard now to find out who he was, Captain. We've been through his clothing. Nothing there to identify him. And look at his face! I doubt that he will ever be identified. His own mother wouldn't know him."

Hazzard nodded, bent down and examined the dead man. He took it for granted that the police had searched the clothing thoroughly. But something might have been overlooked. And suddenly Hazzard's hand darted to the corpse's thick hair. His fingers slipped through, snatched at a tiny object. It was a rolled-up cylinder fastened by fiber to several strands of hair close to the scalp. The light end of it had attracted his attention.

He swiftly palmed the cylinder. Then he rose, asking the inspector the name of the hospital where Crawley had been taken.

The inspector offered to lend Hazzard a police car, but Captain Hazzard declined. He passed outside the circle of cops, slipped through the crowd, to pause at the edge of it under a street light. With taut fingers he unrolled the tiny cylinder. It was a strange message to find on such a man in such a place. Printed in inked letters on tissue-thin parchment, it said:

The poison of red-ant bites is filling my brain. The Jewel Men are close behind me. Spies of the Phoenix are waiting along the coast. Even if I can stow away aboard some ship and reach New York I won't be safe from them. That's why I've written this to put in my hair. Maybe they won't find it when they kill me—and maybe somebody else will. If so, tell Mary Parker that her father and some of his party are still alive at N. Lat. 15.10., W. Long. 89.27, prisoners of the Phoenix. The others who tried to escape with me were killed. It would have been better if they'd got me, too.

John Roan.

Hazzard read it through twice, then a sudden sense of uneasiness made him close his fingers over the parchment, and whirl around. But he wasn't quite quick enough to see the furtive men on the roof of the empty store building who, through the achromatic lenses of a powerful prism monocular, had got the message by reading it over Hazzard's shoulder.

Hazzard made an impatient gesture, feeling that something was wrong. Then he strode to a telephone booth, grabbed a big directory and began thumbing through its pages looking for the address of Mary Parker.

CHAPTER II

THE WHISTLING DEVIL

HE found it, and a swift taxi sped him on his way. At the edge of town, in one of a row of big brick houses, an aged maidservant answered his quick tug on an old-fashioned bell.

Stepping past her into the hallway, Captain Hazzard saw a beautiful golden-haired girl standing as straight and tall as some exotic statue. She had curved red lips, humid eyes, heart-shaped features. Her face held a curious expression. Her expression showed that she recognized him and was puzzled at this visit from a man whom she regarded as a great celebrity.

When he reached her side he said in a quiet voice: "You know me, don't you, Miss Parker?"

"Yes." Her dark blue eyes roved over his face with a mixture of awe and curiosity. "I've heard of you, seen your picture often. You travel over the earth. You're a great aviator, an explorer, a scientist, who sometimes helps people in trouble. But—" her voice shook uneasily—"something extraordinary must have happened to bring you to my house. Tell me, has it anything to do with my father?"

He nodded gravely, looking into her eyes. "Yes."

"Oh!" The clear, rich coloring of her cheeks began to fade. She came closer, laid her hand on his arm. "Don't be afraid to speak the truth, Captain Hazzard. What have you heard from him? Is—he—"

For answer, Hazzard took the thin bit of parchment from his pocket and held it out. He watched her closely as she read the brief message. He saw her face grow strained. Her eyes lifted to his and there was stark fear in them.

"Where did you get this?" she asked.

He told her then about the stow-away with the hideous face who had been slain by the weird death curtain. Her cheeks turned paler. "John Roan was one of my father's men," she said breathlessly. "What could have happened to him? And who—who is this man whom he calls the Phoenix?"

Captain Hazzard shook his head. "You may be able to help me piece the puzzle together. What was your father doing in Central America?"

"You knew he was down there then?" asked Mary Parker in surprise.

Hazzard indicated the figures of latitude and longitude in the note. "Those tell the story, Miss Parker. That compass point is somewhere on the frontier between Guatemala and Honduras, close to the Espiritu Santo range."

She dropped her eyes for a moment, then raised them, and looked deeply into his piercing blue-gray ones. "I promised father I wouldn't tell anyone where he'd gone or what he was doing, Captain Hazzard," she said. "But I can talk to you, trust you, and I've got to have help now that my father is in terrible danger."

"He's an engineer who has been interested for many years in mining properties down in Central America. He has a partner living down there, a clever metallurgist named Kurt Gordon. Gordon and father work together extracting ores."

"Two months ago father went down to Guatemala with a small group of experts to see Gordon about the development of some big deposits of platinum. They didn't have much capital. Rival mining companies would have tried to beat dad to it if they'd got wind of it. That's why the thing had to be kept secret. But now—" she broke off, and tears glistened in her eyes.

"How long has it been since you've heard from him?" asked Hazzard quickly.

"Four weeks. I've radioed both my father and Mr. Gordon, and they couldn't be located. I didn't know what else to do. But now that I know father's whereabouts hadn't I better ask the governments of Guatemala and Honduras to help me? Couldn't I cable our American consuls?"

Captain Hazzard didn't answer for a moment. He was trying to guess what was back of this weirdly murderous organization that reached from the tropical jungles of Central

America to the crowded streets of New York. Presently he said:

"It's big, Miss Parker. Something that must be handled with gloves. I've told you what happened to Roan. We don't want to do anything that will put your father in greater danger. If you asked the help of those Central American governments and then they should blunder—"

"You're right!" Fear darkened the girl's eyes again. "Whatever happens—whoever the Phoenix is—I must save my father. And you, Captain Hazzard—couldn't you—would you consider the possibility of organizing an expedition to help me rescue him? I'll do anything I can. I have some money—"

He made an impatient gesture. "I intended to help you when I came."

"Then—"

"Wait!" Captain Hazzard tensed suddenly and lifted his head. He looked around the room in which they were talking, and his nostrils flared. The blueness of his eyes gave way to a slaty gray. A deep instinctive sense of danger had come like a sinister psychic whisper, tingling his nerves.

He began to move about the room uneasily, peering, prying, like a savage trying to find spoor. He came to a stop abruptly in front of a big bay window, from which he could command a view of the front stoop of the house. He stared, and the muscles under the tanned skin of his face went rigid.

Mary Parker came and stood beside him, staring, too, then lifted a trembling hand to her mouth in horror. "It's crepe!" she gasped. "Black crepe! It's hanging on the door of this house as if some one were dead."

"It wasn't there," said Hazzard, "when I came in."

She gave a stifled gasp. "Can it—Do you suppose it means that father's dead?"

Hazzard shook his head. "It means something else," he said, "something quite different. It means that the men who killed John Roan knew about

that message and know that I came here. It means they intend now to kill us both."

THE tragic look on the girl's face vanished. Personal danger didn't shock her so much as fear of her father's death. Hazzard felt a quick glow of admiration for her nerve.

He pulled her away from the window, drew the shade, and stood for a moment thinking. His psychic feeling of menace was like a chill fog now. They were in deadly danger, and he knew it, but he didn't know from what direction the thing would strike.

A noise interrupted him, the sound of a car drawing up outside. Hazzard thrust his fingers under his coat and grasped the butt of the heavy army Colt automatic he wore in a shoulder holster. He listened and heard feet scraping up the stoop.

The bell rang loudly in the still house, stirring echoes, but Molly, Mary Parker's maid, didn't show any sign of coming to answer it.

Keeping his hand on the Colt, Captain Hazzard motioned the girl back and strode to the door himself. He stood wide-legged, his young face grim, drew the lock back and opened it.

A man in a gray uniform, wearing a visored cap, and holding a white slip of paper stood there. A big black truck was drawn up at the curb. The man said: "Is this the home of Miss Mary Parker?"

When Hazzard nodded, the man held out the paper slip. "Ask her to sign this please, and let me know where she wants 'em."

"Want's what?" asked Hazzard.

"The two caskets. We're making a rush delivery after receiving cash payment as per instructions. Will I have 'em put downstairs or up?"

Icy prickles ran along Captain Hazzard's back. But his face was masklike, inscrutable. It was plain to him that this man in uniform was genuine; merely carrying out orders for the quick delivery of two coffins

which some one else had bought. Hazzard said quietly: "Bring them in. Take them right to the drawing-room." He went back to Mary Parker and spoke soothingly. "Don't be frightened. Our friends are enlarging on their little joke. Now they've presented us with our caskets."

She stood wide-eyed, silent, stricken as the boxes were brought in. Hazzard had them placed in the drawing-room. There was a bleak, hard smile on his face, like sunlight flashing over steel. He looked to see that both coffins were empty, signed the receipt, then dismissed the men.

The macabre black boxes so close at hand were mute reminders that they were both marked for the same dread fate. Hazzard asked:

"Where is your maid's room?"

Mary Parker's hand clutched his wrist, clawlike in its tenseness. "We must find Molly! She should have answered the doorbell."

They went down the old-fashioned, narrow stairway that led to the kitchen and the servant's quarters. Hazzard moved ahead, his big army Colt in his hand.

And it was he who first caught sight of the crumpled, pitiful body of the gray-haired maid. She lay on her back on the kitchen floor staring with wide, glazed eyes at the ceiling.

There was a wire around her neck, tied tight in back.

Mary Parker gave a sobbing sigh when she glimpsed the body and crouched on her knees beside it.

Captain Hazzard crouched, too, but with every nerve alert. He understood something that the girl had failed to grasp in her sorrow. Molly's wanton murder meant that some of the agents of the Phoenix were already in the house.

Even as this thought came there was a faint sound of movement in the dark doorway beside the stairs that led to the servant's bedroom. Hazzard's hand flicked out, flung Mary Parker forward, sent her sprawling flat on the floor, and then dropped himself. He rolled over and over with the snapping suddenness of a tempered spring released.

Bullets followed him. Bullets beat a tattoo along the floor at his heels, like the fangs of Death snapping for his life. The snout of a sub-machine gun with a cylindrical silencer on it gleamed in that black doorway beside the stairs. And a man's eyes gleamed behind it.

It seemed impossible that he could miss. He was turning the snarling gun on its axis, hosing bullets at Captain Hazzard. And the wall of the kitchen was directly in front of Haz-

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zard now, barring further movement.

But before he reached it, even as he was rolling over and over, Captain Hazzard's fingers flashed down to his belt, flashed up again with something in them. His wrist snapped out. The air was filled suddenly with sparkling pellets.

Drops of diphenoloxide inclosed in eggshell-thin glass rained at the feet of the gunman, broke open, filled the air with drifting, smarting fumes. The machine gunner choked and cried out, his eyes streaming. His weapon ripped plaster from the ceiling as he tried vainly to center its sights on Captain Hazzard.

Hazzard was up in an instant. He turned, bounded across the kitchen floor, ducked sidewise to avoid the wildly swinging stream of slugs. His gun muzzle lashed out and cracked down on the skull of the gunman, stunning him. The sub-caliber weapon fell. Hazzard snatched it up. Then he helped the girl to her feet and ran for the back door that led to a garden.

It was unlocked, half open. But caution stayed Hazzard before he bolted through. Caution made him fling the door wide, let his shadow precede him, and freeze in his tracks.

It was well he did so. There was a sudden snapping hiss in the darkness as lead from other silenced sub-calibers converged on the spot where his body would have been.

The slugs came close. They bit at the door frame and forced Hazzard back. There was a grim smile on his lips. He hadn't really expected that there would be an easy way out. Left to himself, he might have played a game of death with those men outside. But there was the girl to consider.

He closed the door quickly, snapped a bolt into place, put the lights out and caught Mary Parker's hand. He led her through the gloom of the kitchen, around the body of Molly, toward the stairs. She was sobbing softly.

He had marked the location of the stairway, and he went to it as easily as though it had been light. Darkness held no terrors for him. He had lived in the dark too long himself to fear it. When he reached the upstairs hallway he switched out the bulb there, left Mary Parker for a moment, and strode to the front door. He opened it, looked up and down the street cautiously.

A gray car was parked a few yards along the block. Metal rods gleamed on top of it like the antennae of a huge, malignant scorpion poised to strike. On the other side of the house, a hundred yards away, another car was parked. Between them, already visible, was a faint aura of eerie luminescence.

Hazzard gritted his teeth. He and Mary Parker were trapped. Guns waited in the yard behind them. In front, ready to sweep them into oblivion, was that weird, pulsating curtain of unholy death.

CHAPTER III

STAIRWAY TO HELL

HE could feel the strange influence of it even as he looked. Dizziness filled him. He raised the gun, but his fingers shook so that he couldn't aim it. He wasn't afraid. It was the unseen, unknown force of that weird, deathly light striking the cells of his body that made him shake. Two steps closer, he knew, would spell certain doom.

He backed up, shut the door quickly, and saw Mary Parker coming towards him along the hall. Her face was white. She said through tight lips:

"There's some one moving upstairs. I just heard footsteps."

Hazzard heard them, too, knew that the agents of the Phoenix were closing in.

Mary Parker's voice was a dry, taut whisper: "The telephone? Can't we call the police?"

He went to it with her, but found as he had expected that the line was dead—cut.

He could send a mental message through space that would summon his own assistants. But he dismissed all thought of that. To call them without giving full information of what they would find would only be leading them to slaughter. And even Captain Hazzard couldn't pretend to transmit telepathically details of the complex situation he faced. His only course was to fight it out alone.

"There must be a skylight," he muttered. "They've come across the tops of the roofs and broken through it. Now they're coming down."

"Yes. All the houses on this block are the same height."

Hazzard asked quickly: "The one next door, on the right—who lives in it?"

"It's vacant."

"Then we've got to go up." His voice was vibrant. His eyes held a light of battle.

"But they're waiting there now!" she whispered. "They'll surely kill us."

He didn't answer. Experience on the wild frontiers of the world had taught him that all life is a gamble when death is close. And Hazzard had some dice of his own to toss on Fate's table.

His belt was strong and wide and made of pliant leather. It had many small pouches, apparently for cartridges. But the compact spaces held a score of objects other than shells. In them he carried some of the gadgets that were the product of his inventive skill, articles he had turned out during his spare time in the laboratory on Long Island.

Hazzard chose a small, greenish, oval-shaped object with blunt excrescences on it. It looked like an enlarged bronze model of some sort of scarab. But the blunt points had tiny holes in them. Hazzard called it his "Whistling Devil."

He touched a button on one end of

it and a faint sputter sounded in the strange thing's interior. Acid began to eat through a tinfoil wall. In a moment, when it touched another acid, a gas would be generated and pressure would build up.

He tossed it into the room with the two coffins, then pulled the girl cautiously toward the stairs.

A minute passed and hell seemed to break loose in that darkened chamber. A fiend appeared to be whipping itself into a stark raving fury. A shrill screech came as gas shot through a whistling vent. The screech mounted. Other screeches joined it. Gas under terrific pressure in the bronze jacket spurted through a dozen whistling holes. The force of it pushed the thing around the room like a whirlwind. It banged into chairs, hit the wall, leaped toward the ceiling, screeching, jumping, clattering.

In the midst of the din, Hazzard took Mary Parker's trembling hand and drew her up the stairs. He knew that the "Devil's" noise would drown out the creak of their steps. It was dark on the stairway. The men above would hear nothing except that startling, nerve-racking sound below.

HAZZARD'S eyes stabbed the gloom. At the first landing, he suddenly thrust the girl behind him and leaped, hurling himself like a projectile on a dim human form he had glimpsed straight ahead. A man was standing on the stairway, gun in hand, eyes alarmed, trying to make out what that fearful racket was.

He saw Hazzard, and tried to raise the weapon. Hazzard knocked it from his hands, then caught him around the waist in a football tackle and lifted him bodily. The man struggled, yelled. Hazzard threw him over the bannisters in a savage, lightning heave that sent him hurtling to the floor below. The gunman landed on his head. His striking body made a thud, but no sound of it came above the wail of the Whistling Devil.

He drew Mary Parker on to the second-story hall. There he paused, peered up, and caught dim movement somewhere between him and the glass skylight of the stairwell. Downstairs, the sound of the Devil was growing fainter now. The gas was almost exhausted. Soon the creak of the stairs under them would be heard. It was time to toss another of his dice.

He whipped a handkerchief from his pocket, turned to Mary Parker and whispered close to her ear: "I'm going to tie this over your eyes and nose."

"What for?" Her voice was a thin gasp of fear.

"Smoke bomb," he said quietly. He placed the handkerchief over her face, knotted it in back. Then he drew a cylinder from his belt containing carbon tetrachloride, sand, zinc dust and magnesium. It was a miniature smoke pot having the same chemical basis as the type used in wartime to hide military ground maneuvers.

He pressed a spark igniter, hurled the cylinder up the stairwell to the floor above. In a moment even the dim glow of the skylight was shut off. Smoke so thick it seemed to have solid substance mushroomed out, filling the whole house. It rolled down the stairs in a stygian cloud, floated up in a sable curtain. Through it, Hazzard faintly heard the oaths of startled men.

He took a deep breath, closed his eyes. Death might still strike through the smoke, for those above had guns. They couldn't see, but they might shoot at random, lay a barrage of lead that would spell destruction.

That was a chance he had to take. He made Mary Parker walk behind him, held her fingers in his left hand, and climbed quickly, keeping the banister on his right. Close to the second floor Mary Parker stumbled as her high heels caught in the stair carpet. She gave a choking gasp. Instantly movement sounded.

Hazzard pulled her down beside him a moment before bullets snarled

above their heads. He couldn't see the flash of the guns. The silencers on the sub-caliber weapons almost deadened the sound of the shots. It was eerie having silent lead come at him out of that black cloud. But he heard the deathly whine of the slugs close above him, felt the wind they made.

His own finger pressed the curved trigger of the gun he had taken from the man in the kitchen. He heard a vicious slap as his slugs struck, heard the cry of a man mortally wounded. A human form came bounding down the stairs, struck his shoulder a glancing blow, and caromed on behind him.

Mary Parker, flattened against the steps, barely missed being hit by the hurtling body. Another gun hissed into life. Cold fear clutched Hazzard's heart. Fear for Mary Parker's life. He snapped more shots at the gun above until it grew silent. But the weapon in his own hands went silent, too, the drum exhausted.

He had his automatic, but he wanted to save its shells. They might be needed later. Even if they reached the roof there would be killers waiting.

HOLDING the sub-caliber gun as a club, Hazzard sprang on up, pulling the girl with him. A man stumbled into him, and Hazzard struck. There was a groan, a thud. Hazzard plunged on through the smoke cloud, reached the top hallway, and a cool draft told him that the open skylight was just ahead.

The black fumes of his smoke bomb were even thicker here. They poured out through the skylight cover in a volcanic cloud. Hazzard half lifted the girl up with him, and reached the roof.

He could see no stars. The black smoke funneled upward hiding the sky. But it would thin presently. Then eyes in the surrounding darkness would see. Crouching men on other roofs would fling lead at them. There might be a dozen, a score of the

Phoenix's killers around them for all Hazzard knew. They would guess soon enough that he and the girl had reached the roof. They would figure on a running flight along the house-tops as the obvious way of escape.

But Hazzard never did the obvious. He moved to the right, to the roof of the empty house next door. Here he stopped again. The billowing smoke still hid them. He had a few seconds in which to work. His hands felt for the skylight.

"You're not going down there?" muttered Mary Parker, her voice muffled by the handkerchief.

"Yes."

"But you said their car was parked outside. You said the death curtain—"

"That's why I'm doing it. They won't expect us. They'll think we're running."

He didn't say that he had another plan in his mind. He drew a thin hacksaw blade from his belt, slipped it under the skylight cover, and cut the hooks. In a moment he raised it softly, stepped in and drew the girl along. He whipped the handkerchief from her face.

"Hurry!" he said.

They moved down the stairs of the dark empty house like a pair of ghosts. Hazzard peered under a drawn shade at street level and saw the killers' gray car standing directly outside. The faint aura of the death curtain was still visible, but only in front of that hairlike antenna. If he could take those men in the parked vehicle by surprise. . . .

That was the plan that he had formed on the roof—to capture that gray car, to escape in it, learn the nature of the fire curtain's devilish mechanism.

But he could see a head on the front seat now. And there must be one or more men in back. Hazzard turned to the girl. "I'm going to open the door and rush them. You stay here and watch. If I beckon, you come running."

Before she could protest, he flung the door wide and went down the steps, shooting. His first bullet glanced off the car's engine hood. The man behind the wheel, the vicious-faced killer with hyena teeth, turned and a gun came magically to his fingers. Flame lanced and lead brushed close to Captain Hazzard. But Hazzard's next two shots were deadly. They seemed to lift Hyena-face in the car seat and batter him to the floorboards.

Other bullets streaked from the rear of the car from a curtained side window. Hazzard smashed lead savagely till spidery cracks appeared in the non-shatterable glass. The gun-flame behind the glass suddenly ceased. Taking a desperate chance, Hazzard turned and motioned to Mary Parker.

She didn't hesitate an instant. Her nerve raised his respect for her. She came down the stoop with her eyes wide and her golden hair flying.

Hazzard held his breath for fear she mightn't make it. He saw chips dance close beside her on the walk as cupro-nickel slugs whipped at her feet from guns on the roof above. Then she was close to the open door of the car. Hazzard heaved out the dead driver, pulled the girl in and took the wheel.

The motor was running. In a moment the gray car moved. But that other car, with the antennae on it, was parked ahead. Men leaned out now, firing. Hazzard backed, twisted the wheel savagely, bounced fat tires up on the sidewalk, and made a desperate turn with lead crashing into the gray car.

He got the headlights pointed in the opposite direction and pressed his foot on the gas. There was plenty of power under that long gray hood. The car leaped ahead like a race-horse given the whip. But the car behind was moving, too, following them swiftly.

Mary Parker crouched beside him, her cheeks flaming with excitement.

He was glad they were close to the suburbs where traffic was slight. He could hold the motor wide open, gamble on his driving skill to get them away.

He sped through quiet streets, whirled onto an open highway, braked daringly and flung the big car on a hairpin turn into another road that ran off at right angles from it.

But bullets still glanced off the gray car's roof, bit into its body, threatened to tear its tires to shreds. And suddenly a dull explosion sounded a few feet from their backs.

Hazzard whirled. Lead had found a mark somewhere in the strange mechanism that made the veil of deathly light. Following that dull report smoke commenced pouring out of both side doors, and he could see flickering light around the edges of the shade that covered the glass behind the driver's compartment.

The gray car was on fire. But to stop now, even to slow up beside the road, meant being mowed down by lead.

CHAPTER IV

EXPEDITION TO NOWHERE

MARY PARKER was gamely silent even when the shade began burning and the window behind them gave out a sinister snap. Hazzard could feel the heat of it on his neck and he glanced back.

The shade had fallen. For the first time, he looked into the car's interior and got a glimpse of the man his bullets had felled back at the house. The murderer of John Roan and four others was now a corpse himself. A horrible human torch with head lolling and hair and clothes on fire. His thin-lipped features made a ghastly grinning mask in the light of the flames.

A black box holding part of the mechanism of the weird death curtain was burning, too. It was out of this that the hottest flames were leaping. Its deadly power was destroyed.

But by an ironic twist of fate it still menaced their lives.

Hazzard's face was strained. His knuckles curved whitely over the black rim of the wheel. The car had become a seething comet. If they stayed in it another few moments, they would be swept on to a flaming death.

He looked for some way out. All hope of saving the death curtain mechanism for investigation had vanished. His only thought now was to save their lives. The ignition would burn through presently, the engine would go dead, the car would stop, and they would be easy prey for the guns of the armed men behind.

Hazzard raced on a few seconds longer, until he saw a field of high dry weed stems. He felt a sudden surge of hope. The wind was bending the dry vegetation toward them. A stiff gale was sweeping the stalks almost flat. There was a flimsy fence in front of the field.

Hazzard called to the girl to hold on tight. He twisted the wheel with sudden violence. The gray car almost turned over. It left the road, bounced over a ditch, struck the wooden fence at a sharp angle.

Rails splintered, and the windshield cracked. Hazzard brought the car around in a wide curve straight into the wind, and plunged through the dry weed stalks. The engine died suddenly, the headlights winked out. But the fire behind them made a glow like a giant torch.

"Jump!" Hazzard literally threw the girl from the seat. She fell on her silken knees in the grass. Now that the car had stopped moving, the flames licked forward into the driver's seat. The glass behind it burst, and the fire reached for Hazzard even as he jumped.

He heard the squealing brakes of the killers' car in the road. Over his shoulder, he saw its headlights goggling as it turned and came through the fence. He kept Mary Parker

from rising as lead cut the stalks over their heads.

The killers' car raced toward them. Hazzard had his automatic out, was shooting; but he was facing men armed with sub-machine guns. His few bullets couldn't stop their attack. His hope centered on something else.

Then it happened! The pluming flames that the wind beat back from the burning car caught the dry grass. The grass went up like tinder. It fanned out before the gale on both sides, making a barrier of flame and smoke that bore down on the attackers. This was what Hazzard had planned when he had swung the burning car into the field.

"Now!" He pulled the girl to her feet and drew her after him in front of the shielding wall of flame. They reached the other side of the field, and Hazzard heard the shrill whine of a laboring motor as the killers' car backed up.

There was a grim, tight smile on his face. He had used the fire which their bullets had set to start another fire which had stopped them. He hurried with the girl across lots and found a road that led to the city. Twenty minutes fast walking brought them to a suburban street where he hailed a cab.

"Whitestone Avenue, College Point. The Hazzard Laboratories," he said.

The cabman started when he recognized his distinguished passenger's face. Those piercing eyes, that hawk-like nose and rugged chin had been pictured often in the papers. He touched his cap respectfully, said: "Yes, sir, Captain."

HAZZARD leaned back with eyes closed as the cab slid through the night. Mary Parker looked at him enquiringly as though she thought he were ill. His face was rapt, trance-like. But something about his appearance awed her, made her keep still.

She didn't know that his mind was concentrating, sending out telepathic

impulses of directing energy that sped through space ahead of the cab.

When they reached the laboratory on College Point, lights sparkled and the whole great building seemed to hum. Off to the right was a big flying field and a group of hangars. The door of one was open. Men in denim were swinging the tail of a huge two-motored monoplane around on a dolly. Skilled mechanics were walking along the torpedo-shaped fuselage toward the giant motors. The ship crouched on its fat airwheels, facing the field lights like a colossal moth ready to take wing.

A young, keen-faced man stood by the watchman at the laboratory gate. He came forward eagerly when the cab with Captain Hazzard and the girl rolled up.

"I got your orders, Captain. You wanted the *Silver Bullet* tuned and made ready. You're going south tonight."

The girl stiffened in surprise. Captain Hazzard hadn't stopped along the way to use a phone. She didn't see how he could have transmitted any orders.

But Hazzard made no explanation. He said, simply: "This is one of my assistants, Miss Parker. Mr. Martin Tracey. He's going with us. You can tell him everything. I'm going to leave you with him for a while."

Tracey saluted and his tanned face cracked into a grin. "Thank you, Captain." He took Mary Parker's arm and followed Captain Hazzard into the big lab.

Hazzard was already twenty feet ahead. He went to his private sanctum and found another of his assistants waiting, a tall, bald-headed man of forty whose shrewd eyes were owlish behind steel-rimmed spectacles. This was Washington MacGowen, called "Wash" for short, a mathematical physicist and one of the most skillful laboratory technicians in the country.

Wash's face was long and solemn now. "I've been worried about you,

Captain," he muttered. "You've been in danger, fighting a group of men who tried their best to kill you in some peculiar way. Why didn't you call some of us to help?"

Hazzard smiled. Wash, too, was able to receive and transmit telepathic messages. He was among the few hand-picked men who knew Hazzard's secrets. Along with Martin Tracey and Crawley, Hazzard had given him the card test for telepathy and clairvoyance when he'd first come to the laboratory to work.*

Hazzard said quietly: "I didn't call you, Wash, because you're too valuable to lose. And you'd have been killed if you'd come to my assistance." He described the strange action of that curtain of death.

Wash shook his head and looked still more solemn when Hazzard had finished. "If I could only get a look at that thing, Captain, I might be able—"

"The apparatus caught fire when bullets struck it," said Hazzard. He quickly swept up the phone on his desk and he put through a call to the police commissioner of New York. When the commissioner answered, Hazzard spoke tersely.

"Your men have found a burning car in a lot at the edge of town by this time. There's a dead man in it. I killed him. I'm not interested in the body. But I am interested in the car. If you'll have it rushed to my place as soon as it is cool enough to handle, I might be able to give you some information on those death-curtain murders. I'll hand the car back as soon as my men have finished with it."

He listened a moment, snapped the

instrument up and turned to Wash. "The commissioner is agreeable. If they get it out here soon enough, you may be able to go over it before we fly."

"Then you plan to take me with you?" There was sudden eagerness in Wash's voice.

Hazzard nodded. "I couldn't risk leaving you behind, Wash. Before we crack this riddle, we'll all need all the brains we've got. And now—" Hazzard pressed a button—"I'll need Crandall to take care of the *Silver Bullet*. And where's Cole tonight?"

Without waiting for Wash to answer, Hazzard spoke into an inter-office amplifier that sounded in every room of the lab and even out in the hangars. "Hazzard calling. Will Jake Cole please come?"

A TALL, lanky man entered Hazzard's office in a couple of minutes. He had a stiff crest of straw-blond hair, a deadpan face, ungainly hands and feet and a nose which sometime or other had been broken. He was chewing gum. He slouched in with seeming negligence and looked at Hazzard blankly without a salute or even so much as a nod.

He was Jake Cole, ex-cowhand from Montana. He knew nothing about science, could hardly add a column of small figures. An auto engine was a deep enigma to him. His tests with the telepathic cards had proved his extra-sensory powers non-existent. But he had certain talents of his own. He was a wizard with a lasso. He could shoot like an Apache with rifle or six-gun, and he was one of the best trackers in the West. No man or horse could leave a trail too faint for Cole to follow.

Hazzard said: "Get your guns oiled, Jake. We're starting for the banana republics in about an hour. I think we may see something of the jungle."

"Suits me, Captain." Cole's jaws worked rhythmically. His deadpan face didn't show any emotion. But

*AUTHOR'S NOTE: This is the test worked out by Doctor Rhine of Duke University. Twenty-five cards are used with five different symbols; a circle, a square, a cross, a star and a wave design consisting of three lines. The subject reads the symbols without seeing them, or attempts to do so, and, by a count based on the law of mathematical probability, they unerringly tell whether or not he is gifted with psychic perception.

Hazzard, who could read his mind like a book, knew that Cole was seething with excitement. He smiled as Cole turned and shuffled off to pack up his equipment he always carried in the hot countries.

Then Captain Hazzard began the serious business of organizing the expedition to go in search of Mary Parker's father.

A half hour before the time set for the take-off, the car in which Hazzard and Mary Parker had taken their wild ride was brought by police escort out to the gates of the lab. Wash MacGowen and three young technicians began a searching examination of the car's interior.

They tore out what was left of the fire-curtain mechanism, made measurements with micrometers, poked and pried with delicate instruments. Wash covered scratch pads with hastily sketched designs and long mathematical equations; then made his report to Captain Hazzard.

Wash was a cautious man, not given to sensational statements, or emotional moods; but Hazzard could see now that he was excited to an abnormal degree. His voice shook as he stood tensely by Hazzard's desk, peering down through his steel-rimmed spectacles.

"I hesitate to make positive statements, Captain. But the thing doesn't appear to be electrical in any ordinary sense. Some electrical amplification may have been used. We found a socket that might have held some sort of tube for a carrier wave. There was also something that looked like a saline condenser. But the rest of the thing is mystifying.

"The rods on top aren't radio antennae. They're made of barium wrapped around a core of tungsten. The other metal we found is an alloy containing gold, molybdenum and rhodonite. I wouldn't want to be quoted, but my guess is that this thing generated, or used, a force outside the field of every-day physics."

Hazzard nodded. "Maybe some

form of molecular or atomic energy."

"Yes, Captain, but good heavens—"

Hazzard interrupted him. "If you'd seen the light rays as I did, felt the effect of them, and seen those poor chaps who were killed by them, you wouldn't be afraid to follow almost any line of reasoning. We're up against an enigma, Wash. And the man who invented this murder weapon is either a homicidal paranoiac or a scheming criminal. We don't know who he is or anything about him. All we know is—he's going to make our trip south mighty dangerous. Now—" Hazzard glanced at his wristwatch—"let's get going!"

They took their places in the spacious cabin, Wash owlsh and silent, peering through his steel-rimmed spectacles. Jake Cole chewing gum and with a high-powered rifle slung over his back. Lacey chatting and explaining things to Mary Parker. Crandall in the control room with Captain Hazzard.

The mechanics stood away. The rumble of the motors rose to a vibrant roar. The great plane quivered, then rolled forward into the wind with Hazzard at the controls.

The ship gathered speed, leaped into the night with a majestic thrust of unleashed power. Her silver wings canted. She left the ground so easily that Mary Parker didn't guess they were up till she saw the lights of the field and hangars falling away.

Hazzard banked, swept out over the Sound for a few minutes, then rose higher, pointing the *Silver Bullet's* nose straight south. He climbed till the tall skyscrapers of Manhattan thrust up into the sky behind them, till Brooklyn and Queens and the Bronx spread out as on a table. He climbed still higher on the wings of the wind till New York fell away, became lost in the haze, and the coast of New Jersey unrolled below them like a glowing bas-relief map.

Then Crandall, looking around with an airman's alertness, sudden-

ly spoke. "There's something in the sky behind us, sir. It seems to be getting nearer. You don't suppose—"

"Yes," said Hazzard. "I've been watching it for the last two minutes. It's another ship following us, hanging right on our tail."

CHAPTER V

THE SKY SHARK

THE STRANGE ship was a light blur in the dark sky back of them. The dogged way it followed them made it seem sinister. It disappeared for seconds when mist intervened, appeared again as starlight glinted on its wings.

Hazzard climbed still higher and advanced the throttle. The *Silver Bullet* roared up through the night sky, seven thousand, eight thousand. The air began to get thin and cold. Hazzard flattened, advanced the throttle still more, watched eagerly to see whether the plane behind could still keep up. It did. More than that, it was climbing for still greater altitude, getting a thousand feet above their tail.

A sense of danger filled him. He saw the blur of the other plane change its outline. He got the impression that the tail was up now, the nose down. The ship grew bigger, its superior altitude giving it increased speed. It was in a fast power dive.

Then a searchlight winked from the nose of that other ship. It stabbed across empty space like a spectral finger, and rested on the fuselage of the *Silver Bullet*. Hazzard's plane hung in dazzling light like a moth caught in a flame.

Sparks suddenly shot off from the beam of the searchlight. They were tracer bullets from a machine gun and they snarled close to Hazzard's ship. Slugs were mixed with the tracers. One snapped through the *Silver Bullet's* wing.

But only one. Hazzard side-slipped away quickly. The beam of the

searchlight left them. The other plane went roaring by. Hazzard got a glimpse of it. It was a small, fast, low-wing monoplane with a single motor. It was coming back now. It had the flashing speed of the fastest army pursuit job, and it seemed invincible.

But Hazzard gave an order to Crandall. "Raise the L.O. motor—then stand by."

Crandall reached forward and pulled a small lever. There was a faint grinding vibration in the ship. For a moment it lost speed as something obstructed the smooth flow of the slipstream above the fuselage. Thin metal panels in the top of the *Silver Bullet* slid back. From between them a thing like a huge torpedo reared up. It rose on powerful steel supports till it was six feet above the fuselage, pointing back and well above the tail assembly. There was a round vent in the after end.

"All ready, sir," said Crandall.

HAZZARD threw a switch on the instrument board and the strange torpedo-shaped thing began to hum a deeper note than the forward motors. It was another motor, an auxiliary rocket motor, using a mixture of liquid oxygen and highest gas, and based on the same general principles as Fritz von Opel's rocket engines, used successfully on cars in Germany. It was one of many reasons why the *Silver Bullet* was no ordinary ship.*

A faint glow appeared at the end of the vent. The glow became a blush of light, then a shooting flame, reach-

*AUTHOR'S NOTE: In creating the first efficient rocket motor for use in airplanes, Captain Hazzard first studied the ground already covered by such experts as Valier, von Opel, Doctor Goddard, Herman Oberth and others. His success lies in the great improvement of his carburetor-type injection nozzles, through which the freezingly cold liquid oxygen is fed into the combustion chamber. The main drawback of Hazzard's, and all other rocket motors, is their tendency to overheat.

ing back suddenly across the sky. It seemed to burn a vacuum in the air. The pilot in the other ship must have thought he had set Hazzard's ship on fire. The shooting, powerful stream of gas from the torpedo-shaped motor was like the fiery tail of a comet. It aided the two forward motors of regular design.

The *Silver Bullet* surged forward. A hundred miles an hour was added to its speed. The long stream of fiery gas stretched back across the sky as straight as a string. The *Silver Bullet* was set on a plumb-like course for the south. No turns or quick maneuvers were possible while the rocket motor hummed.

For a moment the hostile plane was visible in its light, a dancing hornet in a giant sunbeam. But its sting was ineffectual now. It fell away behind, disappeared in the mist as Hazzard's ship outdistanced it with a speed no ordinary plane could match.

Mary Parker saw the glow in the sky behind them and stared with frightened eyes. Martin Tracey put her fears to rest by explaining how the rocket motor functioned.

With the aid of that auxiliary power unit the *Silver Bullet* was traveling at terrific velocity now. But, while the rocket motor was running, Hazzard watched the temperature dial with a wary eye. The liquid oxygen, close to one hundred and ninety degrees centigrade cold when it was injected into the combustion chamber, soon became fearfully hot. Overheating was a constant menace.

The *Silver Bullet* roared through the night, crossing cities, counties and states as it sped ever southward on its strange rescue quest. . . .

IT was somewhere over Mexico, just before dawn, that the temperature reached the danger line, and Hazzard stopped the rocket motor. The sudden decrease in the speed

was apparent instantly, though the *Silver Bullet* was still doing two hundred and eighty miles an hour. The rocket motor would have to cool for at least an hour before it could be restarted.

And, as though the malign intelligence of the Phoenix had arranged it, his agents chose that time to strike again. Terror reached out of the skies at Hazzard's party, terror that made even Hazzard feel fear.

For as dawn came over the mountains of Mexico like a silver, ghostly thing, two planes rose swiftly in the sky to meet the *Silver Bullet*. Two planes flying three hundred yards apart, holding their course steadily like ships in army formation.

At first, Hazzard thought they were government ships, planes patrolling in connection with the Mexican *Rurales*.

But when he changed his course a little and climbed higher, the planes ahead changed, too. Not only that, they seemed to be hedging to get the *Silver Bullet* between them.

Then Hazzard's sharp eye saw something that brought him up taut with dread. On top of one ship, dimly outlined against the first dawn light, was a spidery web of rods and wires—one of the strange tungsten-barium aerials of the Curtain of Death.

Hazzard pressed a button that sounded a gong in the ship. Crandall came running. The others sat up quickly, their faces strained and ghostly in the faint dawn light. Hazzard's four assistants knew that the sound of that gong meant deadly danger.

Hazzard snapped orders. "Man the machine gun, Crandall. Martin, look out for Miss Parker. See that she fastens her belt. Jake, get in the turret with your rifle."

Hazzard side-slipped and veered. Wind shrieked in the wings of the *Silver Bullet*. One of the strange, death-curtain planes dropped forma-

tion suddenly and dived to the right. The maneuver almost got Hazzard between them. Across the sky, like a faint and horrible aura, stretched a spotty curtain of fire. The shimmering, uncanny beams spread out, touched, retreated, touched again.

There was sweat on Hazzard's forehead. The nose of the *Silver Bullet* was aimed straight at that death light. It seemed that nothing could stop it from diving through. Hazzard knew the horrible end that faced them if it did. The image of John Roan's corpse was before his eyes.

He shoved the throttle to the quadrant stop. He pulled the stick back into his lap and brought the plane's nose up in a hurtling, roaring zoom. The *Bullet* climbed like a demon as though terror had even struck at its own steel heart. Up till it was hanging on its propellers, up still farther till it was over on its back. And, as it made the mighty zoom, its tail surfaces brushed that cloud of light.

Hazzard felt again that fearful dizziness that had come when he was standing at the top of Mary Parker's steps. He flipped the *Silver Bullet* over in an Immelmann turn, knowing that he had saved himself and his party from death only by a few spare feet. He was roaring in the opposite direction now; had lost speed in the zoom. The other ships using their quicker maneuverability, headed him off. The light curtain swept toward him.

This time Hazzard waited, while the nearest of the hostile planes bored in. He seemed to be inviting the death they held out to him. He let his ship stall, drop off into a falling leaf—as though it were out of control.

Then suddenly, with the weird light almost upon them, Hazzard brought the *Silver Bullet* back under control. He flattened her out, side-slipped directly toward the nearest of the two approaching ships.

HE heard the *crack* of Jake Cole's rifle. Looking back he caught a glimpse of Jake standing in the turret. The lanky cowboy was shooting with the nonchalance of a rodeo performer. He was actually chewing gum. His jaws worked rhythmically. *Crack, crack!* His rifle spoke twice more. Hot shell casings leaped out of the ejector as though in savage glee.

The nearest plane with the tripod on it suddenly canted its wings and fell away. The light curtain sank down after it; a weird mesh drawn by those spider-web rods. The sky ahead of the *Silver Bullet* was clear. Then the curtain vanished entirely as the mechanism in the strange plane ceased to function. The plane swooped earthward in a long erratic dive.

They watched it go down; saw the dawn light strike the wings, saw it fall straight toward the rocky side of a mountain. Then suddenly a red rose seemed to blossom on the cliffs. The rose was followed by black smoke and the plane disappeared. The second plane had fled. . . .

They reached Guatemala three hours later, and the great volcanic peaks of San Pedro, Santa Maria and Toliman lifted up on the horizon. The *Silver Bullet* sped over green jungles, high mountain ridges dotted with Indian villages and shimmering clear blue lakes. Hazzard decided to fly to the compass point John Roan had mentioned in his note before trying to land.

Lacey explained to Mary Parker that they were close to their goal now. She came forward to where Captain Hazzard studied his compass. He had a map of Guatemala in front of him painted on transparent membrane, set in a boxlike frame. Thin lines of light from mirrors underneath showed on the map. They moved slowly. Where they crossed was the position of the plane.

It was another of Hazzard's inventions, his telautographic compass. He had many such transparent maps

of all sections of the globe. By fitting them into the frame he could see his exact location in relation to topographical points.

The lines were converging now at north latitude 15, west longitude 89. Mary Parker's cheeks flushed as the plane sped forward, and the lines crawled ever closer to the Espiritu Santo range.

The mountains were under their nose now, high, volcanic, rugged. They crossed the main ridge, swept over a deep basin of dense jungle stretching for several miles. Another peak rose in its center, conical and grim. The plane bored on. The cone-shaped mountain had a feather of smoke stuck in a crater at its top. It came steadily nearer. They were close to it now—over it. The lines of the map showed 15.10—89-27.

"Now!" Captain Hazzard pointed. Mary Parker gasped in sudden dismay. "That? It can't be! It's a volcano. There's nothing on it. No one could live there!"

CHAPTER VI

GREEN FURY

CAPTAIN HAZZARD, too, stared tensely at that forbidding peak. Tumbled cliffs. Barren slopes. Deserted ravines. Not a vestige of grass. The green wall of the jungle halted at the edge of the volcanic rock as if eruptions in the past had put a dreadful curse on all growing things.

"How—how shall we find him?" Mary Parker's face showed that she had already lost faith in the search for her father.

But Captain Hazzard said nothing. He kicked the rudder, thrust the stick sidewise, brought the *Silver Bullet* around in a steep-banked turn. In descending spirals, he lost altitude. The black, sinister crater of the mountain rose to meet them.

He passed directly over it. Heat from those subterranean depths made bumpy air. The *Silver Bullet*

rocked and bucked. He circled then, skirted the outer edges of the crater.

"Dead as the moon, Captain," said Jake Cole grimly. "I'll be a horned toad if even a gopher could pitch tent down there!"

Martin Tracey nodded. "Those figures Roan wrote in that message must be off. Maybe the ant bites made him nutty."

"And yet," Wash MacGowen stroked his long chin judicially, "doesn't it seem a little strange that those numbers should exactly correspond to this peak? It is the only mountain in this immediate jungle area. More than coincidence, I should say."

Hazzard was thinking the same thing. Though nothing showed on that grim mountain, he wasn't satisfied that John Roan's figures were wrong. From the first the Phoenix had been clothed in mystery.

Mary Parker repeated her question. "How can we find my father?"

Hazzard turned to her. "There's only one way—investigate that volcano."

"But there's no place to land, even if—"

"No." Hazzard looked at his map. "Lake Izabal is forty miles away. The nearest landing field is fifty. But there's an Indian village ten miles back. I saw it when we came over. Some of us will land there in 'chutes. Then we can reach the mountain through the jungle."

"Some of us!" The girl repeated the words and a look of consternation crossed her face. "You mean you won't take me?"

"Have you ever made a 'chute jump?" asked Hazzard.

"No. But I'll do anything—anything to be with you when you find my father." Her face was eager. There was no fear in her eyes. Hazzard nodded approvingly. She had the right stuff in her.

"All right," he said. "I'll give you a special 'chute we have, one with a

self-operating ripcord. You jump—it does the rest.”

He headed the plane's nose north, swept over ten miles of jade green jungle and saw the Indian village again. The architecture told him it belonged to a tribe of Chicastenangos.

They came running out to the streets as the plane swept low. They had queer costumes of bright red and blue. The men wore big-brimmed hats. The women had on *halos*, twenty-foot strips of red-and-blue hand-woven cloth wrapped around their copper-colored bodies. Their hair was black as night. The village was a tiny cluster of adobe houses perched on a terraced hillock that rose out of the jungle. There was a small square in it.

Hazzard noted the wind direction. If they bailed out at just the right altitude from just the right position it would carry them into the village. He turned the controls over to Crandall who could be depended upon to jockey the ship properly.

Wash went first. All of Hazzard's men had made 'chute jumps before. Wash made the drop as unemotionally as he'd add a column of figures. There was a special trapdoor in the *Silver Bullet's* floor. Wash simply climbed into his 'chute harness and slid through. Jake followed, chewing gum rhythmically as he went. He claimed that the movement of his jaws helped him to count off the seconds before he pulled the ripcord.

Hazzard dropped the parachutes of equipment next. Wash and Jake would be on the ground before they landed, so the Indians wouldn't appropriate them.

Then Lacey jumped, looking anxiously at Mary Parker. He'd already come to feel a proprietary interest in the girl. But Captain Hazzard put her into the auto-ripcord 'chute. There was a small, clocklike device on the back which could be set to jerk the ripcord at any given moment. Hazzard set it carefully and led the

girl to the trap. Her face was pale, but she was smiling. She looked trim and athletic in her tropical shorts.

Hazzard strapped an automatic and a hunting knife around her waist, tied a first-aid kit containing anti-venom for snake bites and a water canteen on it. "After the 'chute opens," he said, "just pull the shroud lines in the direction you want to go. Spill a little air out and you can steer the thing like a glider."

She nodded, stepped to the trap and said: "Okay."

HAZZARD pressed a button and Mary Parker dropped into space. He watched to see her 'chute open, then got ready to jump himself. "We'll keep in touch with you by radio," he said to Crandall. "You can let us know where you land."

Crandall nodded, grinning. Taking care of the *Silver Bullet* was his especial pride.

Hazzard stepped easily through the trap and plunged into space. He didn't pull the cord till the ground was a few hundred feet below. The delayed jump let him catch up with the others. He touched at the same time Wash and Jake did, and he was able to help Mary Parker gather up the folds of her 'chute when she landed close to the little square.

Indians swarmed around them, staring curiously. Some made signs to ward off evil spirits. Others grinned, showing ivory teeth. Most of the Indians in Guatemala were friendly. Naked, copper-colored kids ran up and poked at their chutes and equipment till Hazzard shooed them away.

He was an expert linguist and he addressed the Chicastenangos in their native dialect. "Quichi lana," he said, pointing to the cone of the volcano ten miles away. "Fire mountain." "*Un nihongi atlan—I go through jungle. Tulul cuintla pan zumala—we need a guide.*"

A change came over the Indians. Their faces sobered. Many backed



*The air was filled with
steel-shafted spears.*

away. Others shook their heads. "Chal! Chal!—No! No!" they cried. "Huetenzo!—Accursed!"

There was fear in their eyes and they began to talk vehemently. They told Hazzard that people from their village never went to the mountain now. A few had in the past and never came back. No trace of them had ever been found. The mountain was *Huetenzo*, cursed in some strange way. Its name was *Omoxtotl*, which meant Terror's Shadow.

Besides that there were murderous Indians in the jungle, fierce Tzutuhiles left over from the tribes that even Cortez's lieutenant, Don Alvarado, had been unable to subdue. There were poisonous snakes and dangerous animals.

Hazzard glimpsed one Indian at the edge of the crowd who didn't seem as excited as the others at the talk of going into the jungle. He wore a spray of the rare *figa-figa* berries in his hat, which meant that he understood jungle magic. And in his belt was the fang of a python which meant he was a great hunter.

"Your name?" asked Hazzard, pointing suddenly.

"Ulzi," said the Indian promptly.

"You are a mighty hunter," said Hazzard. "You know the jungle trails. You are a great witch-doctor. The evil spirits cannot scare you. You will lead the people-who-dropped-from-the-sky to Omoxotl."

Still the Indian looked doubtful, and there was a glint of fear in his eyes. Hazzard continued: "I, too, am a great witch-doctor. . . . Watch!"

He always carried a kit of chemicals in his knapsack. These, along with the gadgets in his belt, made a wide range of chemical "magic" possible. He brought two small empty test tubes out now and a piece of white cloth that had been dipped in cobalt-chloride. Ulzi nodded, grunting skeptically.

Hazzard slipped a lump of calcium in one tube and held his finger over it. This absorbed moisture, making the air inside the test tube dry. He drew his thumb away quickly, put the white cloth in, then again covered the top of the test tube.

"Look!"

Before Ulzi's startled eyes the white cloth turned a vivid blue. The Indians watching exclaimed in admiration. Ulzi looked awestruck; then quickly drew his face into a mask to show that he was not impressed.

Hazzard took another strip of the white, cobalt-chloride-treated cloth and placed it in the second test tube, along with a drop of water to make the air damp. This strip turned a vivid pink. Ulzi couldn't prevent his eyes from growing wide with wonder.

Then Hazzard took a small nickel-plated flashlight from his pocket and gave it to the Indian. "For the great hunter and magician," he said, "who will lead the white witch-doctor through the jungle to Omoxotl."

Ulzi nodded and struck his chest, his pride aroused by Hazzard's flattery and his competitive spirit stirred by Hazzard's trick. "Ulzi's own magic is so great he does not fear Omoxotl," he said.

Hazzard picked up his knapsack and pointed toward the forrest. The other members of his party gathered their things. Following Ulzi, they started down the terraced hill toward the green wall of the jungle. The Indians watched them go, shaking their heads and muttering. Just as they reached the jungle, the Chicastenangos began a chant; low, wailing, monotonous, rising and falling in a minor cadence. The chant for great hunters doomed not to return from the never-never land. . . .

THE JUNGLE grew ominously still after they had been walking for two hours. The monkeys ceased chattering. The bright-colored birds kept out of sight. Ulzi rolled his eyes nervously. Hazzard felt the first vibrations of a psychic warning that danger was creeping close.

The stillness of the jungle wrapped itself around them like a brooding, malevolent thing. It seemed suddenly to Hazzard that eyes were watching them—hostile eyes, baleful and murderous.

Hazzard's gaze darted upward suddenly. He saw movement in the great Ceiba tree ahead of them under which the trail wound. He called a

warning, but not quite soon enough. Something streaked down like a flash of light from its green branches.

It struck Ulzi in the chest, and the copper-skinned hunter fell with a piercing cry. He lay still with a green-plumed spear sticking out of his body.

Hazzard fired at almost the same moment. There was another cry in the Ceiba's dense branches. The foliage moved, rustled. A body hurtled from it and fell beside Ulzi at the edge of the trail. The black vultures flapped their wings greedily.

Captain Hazzard ran forward. The man who had speared Ulzi lay on his back with his eyes open, glaring. There was a hole drilled through his head. It was no wonder Hazzard hadn't seen him till too late. He wore a green cloak of quetzal feathers, brilliant as the foliage. His face was the color of the reddish tree branches. The only conspicuous thing about him was the metal headband that held a bright, gleaming green jewel in the center of his forehead.

Ulzi gave a moan. "*Chlan cuinali*," he said.

"What does he mean?" asked Wash somberly.

"The Jewel Men," said Hazzard. "They are Tzutuhiles—the worst Indians going. But—" His hand reached forward and touched the spear in Ulzi's body. Ulzi lay still now. He was dead. And Hazzard's eyes were bright with consternation. "This spear has a metal shaft—made of hollow tubing like a golf club."

"What!" Wash felt the spear, too. So did Jake and Tracey.

"It means," said Hazzard, "that some white man has armed them recently—some white man who is using them as guards to keep everyone else away. The Phoenix!"

Even as he spoke, something whispered through the branches. If he hadn't ducked instantly a green-plumed spear would have stretched him beside Ulzi.

"Run!" Hazzard pointed toward some black rock formations where huge vultures perched. Sinister as the rocks and their sentinels looked, they offered the only place of refuge.

CHAPTER VII

SLAVES OF FIRE

THE AIR was filled suddenly with steel-shafted spears, whistling, hissing, thudding. One came so close to Hazzard's face he could feel the breeze of it. Another zipped past his back. Hazzard opened fire with his automatic.

Martin, Jake and Wash began shooting. Cordite fumes drifted through the leaves. The crack of their weapons made a steady tattoo as they ran for the rocks.

Another Indian hurtled out of a high Ceiba tree where he'd been hiding. He did a somersault in the air, landed on a lower limb and hung there gruesomely for a moment, blood dripping from his neck.

A savage fifty feet to one side came running out of a bush, took three steps forward with a bullet in his heart, then dropped. Jake was taking steady toll with his high-powered rifle. He shot as fast as he could slide the bolt action and pump the trigger. But the whole jungle seemed filled with savages. Bullets alone would never let Hazzard's party reach the rocks.

Hazzard tugged desperately at his belt and drew out another smoke bomb. This one gave off white vapor and Hazzard used it in conjunction with a pair of infra-red ray goggles. He slipped the goggles on now, wishing he'd brought others, enough for the whole party. But he hadn't. The lives of all of them depended on this single pair.

He pulled the striker of the bomb, tossed it tensely and heard it explode with a violent *pouff*. White smoke spurted. It was denser than fog. It slipped through the leaves in ghostly

streamers, crept along the ground.

Hazzard heard the Tzutuhiles yelling. The infra-red ray goggles, picked up light waves on one end of the spectrum only, the end which the white smoke did not touch, enabling him to see dimly through the vapor which blinded all the others.*

Martin, Wash, Jake and Mary Parker were already turned around, groping helplessly. Hazzard ran up to them, made them hold hands, and put Jake at the head. He told Jake, whose ears were sharp, to follow the sound of his footsteps.

Strung out so, Hazzard led his party toward the rocks. But the Tzutuhiles hadn't been scared off. They were fierce, murderous warriors eager for the kill. Hazzard saw one of them directly in his path. The Tzutuhile couldn't see him, but the Indian's ears, sharp as Jake's, had detected the sound of feet.

The Jewel Man had a piercing cry which told his fellow tribesmen that he had located the prey. It was like the cry of a killer wolf calling the slaving pack. He raised his spear to fling it in the direction of Hazzard's footsteps.

Hazzard dodged when the spear came whistling past his head. Then he ran forward toward the Tzutuhile. The man shrieked again, and stood his ground, eyes glaring, lips curling away from hideous teeth that had been filed to points. He tried to see through the smoke. He whipped out a long knife and ran at Hazzard.

Still Hazzard didn't shoot. He crouched on one knee quickly, seized the knife wrist of the leaping savage, and used the Indian's own momentum to lift him and hurl him through the air.

*AUTHOR'S NOTE: Captain Hazzard got his idea for these when army aerial photographers recently took pictures of New York City through a bank of dense clouds. They used an infra-red ray filter on their lens. They couldn't see the ground, but the camera films were affected by the infra-red rays coming up through the clouds.

The green-robed Indian whirled over Hazzard's head and struck the ground with a thud. The knife flew from his hand. He bounced up and came back at Captain Hazzard. Hazzard felled him this time with a blow from his gun butt.

The rocks were directly ahead now. The vultures were lighting up on broad wings as the smoke rolled toward them. Their furious croaks mingled with the war screams of the Tzutuhiles.

Three of the Jewel Men came together and seemed to agree on some stratagem. Holding their steel-shafted spears in line they ran straight at Hazzard's party.

Hazzard knew then that the smoke was thinning, that the Indians could see. He pulled his goggles aside and made sure of it. The Tzutuhiles' arms were drawing back. Another instant and at least one of Hazzard's party would be pierced by knife-sharp steel.

"Drop!"

Jake Cole and the others obeyed Hazzard's order as two of the spears came whistling over their heads. The crack of Hazzard's automatic broke the arm of the third Indian. The two others came on with their knives. Hazzard fired twice more and the Tzutuhiles fell back yelling and nursing broken fingers.

But there was no time to lose. The smoke was vanishing rapidly. From all sides the Jewel Men were closing in.

CAPTAIN HAZZARD mounted the rocks and helped Jake Cole after him. Jake pulled the rest of the party. The first fringe of volcanic boulders ended sharply. Behind them was another higher group, pitted with potholes and caves. Some gigantic upheaval of nature thousands of years before had left these weird monuments. There were natural bridges, caverns, huge upthrust spires.

Hazzard found a great, high-roofed cavern that had only two places to enter, and here they stopped. They

could stand off the Tzutuhiles. If their bullets failed, Hazzard had some tear-gas pellets.

The green-robed Indians appeared on the outer wall. But slugs from Jake's rifle made them hesitate. Every time a jeweled forehead showed itself Jake made powdered rock spurt in the Indian's face.

When the Indians showed no sign of making a rush, Hazzard stationed Jake at one entrance, Martin at the other. Then he announced:

"When it gets dark, I'm going to visit Omoxotl. The four of you can stay here till I get back. That should be in five or six hours. You've got the portable radio. If I don't show up by daybreak call Randall. Get him to use the high-power radio in the plane to get in touch with the government of Guatemala. They'll send soldiers to rescue you."

Mary Parker's dark eyes were filled with apprehension. "But the Indians will kill you! They're waiting in the jungle. How will you get through?"

"Don't worry about that, ma'm," said Jake Cole grimly. "The Captain could slip in an Indian's ear and the varmint would never know it. But—" he looked at Hazzard pleadingly, "you'll be needing company. You'd better take me with you."

"Sorry, Jake, I can't. The girl has to be guarded. The Tzutuhiles might take it into their heads to attack in the dark. As it is we've got to roll rocks up to both entrances."

They spent the afternoon making the cave safe against a rushing attack. Hazzard was sure that Jake and the others would be able to hold it unless something utterly unforeseen happened. But he wasn't so sure that he could get back. Visiting Omoxotl at night was like a challenge hurled in the teeth of Fate.

YET, when night came, he slipped out quietly. The tropic blackness swallowed him. The trees seemed to enfold him in their branches. Those

long years when he had been blind himself, living in darkness, had borne strange fruit. His muscles were trained like an animal's to act on instant reflexes. He had learned to walk swiftly, warily on springy toes. His mind, with its uncanny powers of clairvoyance, made him aware of things that the physical eye couldn't see.

He passed across the outer wall of rocks until a musky smell in the air told him that a lurking Tzutuhile was close at hand. The feeling of danger, the mysterious telepathic vibration that a hostile mind gave out, made it possible for him to avoid the savage. He moved on quickly, stealthily into the solemn terror that was the jungle night.

Hazzard heard the death scream of some small animal being struck down. He heard the horrid bubbling smacks of a jaguar feasting on fresh-killed meat. Once his senses screamed a different warning. The inner realms of his mind whispered: "Snake"!

A muskiness quite different from that of the Indian odor reached his nostrils. It was pungent, sickening. A reptilian odor this time. He crouched back behind a tree and waited while a great, forty-foot anaconda writhed its terrible crushing coils across the jungle floor.

Then Hazzard caught the smell of a man again. He crouched and waited. The shuffle of bare feet sounded soon. That meant he was near a trail. And as he crouched, one of the Jewel Men went by, walking in the direction of Omoxotl.

Moving silently, running from tree to tree like a specter, Hazzard followed him mile after mile. All the while his sense of direction told him that they were getting nearer Omoxotl.

He was sure of it when the ground began to rise. The sponginess left the earth. The trees began to thin. Suddenly they ceased altogether and Hazzard was out in a world of barren rock.

The footsteps of the Indian were fainter now, more muffled. Hazzard hurried ahead till he felt a sudden warm eddy of air on his face. The air, besides being warmer, had a different smell to it, a faint odor of sulphur. Hazzard guessed that he was standing close to a passage through the rocks.

He moved in and heard the feet of the Indian just ahead of him. The man muttered something, and another guttural voice replied. A guard! Hazzard crept forward as stealthily as a jaguar. When the Indian he'd been following went on, Hazzard sprang at the guard, ducking the spear that was thrust toward him. Hazzard stilled the cry on the guard's lips by a smashing blow of his gun. He lowered the limp body and sped after the Indian who was his unknowing guide.

The passage went up now. It seemed to go interminably through the very heart of the rock. An endless corridor of stifling, sulphurous darkness.

Then Hazzard glimpsed a faint glow ahead of him, reflected on the smooth sides of the passage, making it possible for him to get a dim silhouette of the man in front. He stopped a moment later, peering along another passage that ran off sharply to the right. There was a great room at the end of it, a room with a domed ceiling; a natural cavern in the mountain with great, high stone-buttressed walls.

But it wasn't the chamber that caught his quick interest. It was the men in it. Chained men, toiling at some unknown task before gleaming holes in the rock.

THE SULPHUR smell was stronger now. A faint acrid haze hung in the air. Out of those furnace-like holes came glowing light. The men's bodies were bathed in sweat. He could see the glisten of it. He wasn't close enough to see their faces, to know whether Mary's father

and his partner, Kurt Gordon, were among them.

He couldn't even tell whether these were white men. Their skins were blackened, burned. But they were slaves obviously, chained to some grueling work, held against their will before those weird holes of fire. And Hazzard realized in a flash that the Phoenix was using the power of the great volcano, Omoxotl, for some strange purpose of his own.

He crept closer, trying to get a better look at the men. He noted then that there were other weird figures in the room not chained—Indians dressed in hideous costumes made from the skins of anacondas, with the gaping heads of the great serpents serving as parkalike hoods. The fangs had been left in. The eyes had been ornamented with green jewels. Python Men!

And they had whips, long scourges of plaited leather. As he watched, a whip flashed out with a crack like a pistol. It flayed the naked shoulders of a chained slave who had dared to pause in whatever he was doing. The slave gave a choking scream of pain and stumbled back to his work.

Hazzard's nerves went taut. This was like some nightmare; like a world of fantastic horror such as a madman might conceive. He tried to glimpse more. His curiosity spurred him on. His boldness brought him close to disaster. For a sudden whisper of sound in the darkness back of him made him turn. He was almost too late.

Three silent Python Men, dressed in snakeskins, had crept upon him. He could see the gleam of their coal-black eyes, the shine of their faces. They had whips, too. They were evidently guards who had come to relieve the others in the big chamber watching over the slaves.

He leaped straight at them—a thing they didn't expect. They lifted the heavy butts of their whips, tried to rain stunning blows on his head.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WHISPERING SCOURGE

He snatched one whip away, cracked a man with its butt, then grabbed him as he fell and swung him violently, knocking the others down. He leaped between them before they could rise and grab his legs. It would be fatal to everything if he were caught by them now.

He ran into a side corridor that slanted off darkly to the right. The Python Men were following, and he knew by their cries and the sounds of other footsteps that the guards in the slave room had joined them in pursuit.

They followed him for perhaps five minutes, then stopped abruptly. Hazzard stopped, too, listening, wondering why they'd seemingly given up the chase. There was no sound now. The silence was weird, forbidding, and Hazzard's scalp prickled with an intimation that something was wrong. He clicked on his flashlight.

For a moment he saw nothing strange. He was standing in a rock-walled passage. It had an uneven ceiling pitted with holes. It sloped ahead of him on a gentle grade. Then Hazzard noticed that there was a black vent close to the floor of the corridor about ten feet away, two more farther on.

And as he looked something came through them—wisps of yellow, writhing, sulphurous smoke. The smoke became red suddenly, red with glowing flame.

Hazzard moved toward it, eyes wide with wonder. The flame broadened. The glowing smoke had substance to it now. It was thick, bubbling, oozing forward steadily out of the holes. It hissed on the floor, spread out like pancake batter. It was molten lava, he realized, poured purposely into the passage through those vents to head him off.

He took two steps forward, stopped as the hideous, bubbling pool crept toward him. A fiery arm of the stuff reached out like a tentacle to clutch him. Hazzard could go no farther. He was trapped.

BACK in the cave, Jake, Martin, Wash and Mary Parker were filled with unreasoning dread. Hours had passed. No sight or sound of Captain Hazzard had come.

Mary Parker got a cigarette from Martin and smoked it in short nervous puffs. She paced back and forth. Her boots stirred whispering echoes that mingled with the strange sounds of the night. Those night noises scared her. The weird cries of the howling monkeys sounded like lost souls calling out there in the dark. And the bats! They kept slipping into the cave entrances, swooping low and staring at her out of small malevolent eyes.

But most of all she was frightened about her father. Now that darkness had fallen, now that Captain Hazzard didn't come back, all her fears returned. She stopped before Martin Tracey finally.

"Why—why do you suppose Captain Hazzard doesn't come back?" Her hands were clenched fiercely. Her eyes were big and dark.

And Martin wasn't his usual smiling self. His face looked pale, strained.

Mary noticed it. "You're frightened, too, aren't you?" she said.

He nodded. "Not for us—I'm thinking of the Captain. He's in a tough spot. I can feel—something has happened."

"Oh!" Mary Parker let her cigarette drop.

Martin turned to Wash, and in the bald-headed man's eyes he read somber agreement. Something had happened to Captain Hazzard. All was not well with him. Discordant vibrations which meant trouble were coming through the unseen ether. Even Jake Cole seemed to sense them faintly. His jaws moved with melancholy slowness as he stood, rifle ready, at one door of the cave.

Then in the troubled silence that followed, Mary Parker suddenly said: "Listen! What's that?"

They all heard it—a new sound out there in the darkness, a strange, uncanny whispering that seemed to fill the whole air.

"The wind maybe," said Martin. "It's been still tonight, but now I guess it's rising. Those must be leaves."

Jake Cole shook his head. He was all attention suddenly. His jaws had stopped. "Can't be the wind. That noise ain't in the trees—it's on the ground. Put out the candle, Wash. Let's see if there's anything comin'."

Wash snuffed the candle and the cave suddenly was pitchy dark. They could hear Jake close to the entrance, leaning against the piled-up rocks. "Nothing to see," he muttered. "No Injuns. But that noise—"

It was louder now—a steady, persistent whisper that got on Mary Parker's nerves. "The light, please!" she gasped. "I don't like it. I—I'm frightened."

Wash lighted the candle again; but the noise did not cease. It was louder still.

Jake Cole was tense before the entrance, prowling, peering, sniffing. "It beats me," he said. "It sounds like something crawling. I never heard nothin' like it before—except—"

"What? What is it? If you know please tell us," said Mary Parker. "It's coming here."

Jake didn't answer; but the sound was almost upon them now. It was in the grass outside the cave entrance. It was the restless, persistent movement of millions of insect feet.

"Ants! I thought so!" Jake was pointing now. Then he sprang forward and slapped at the stones that filled the entrance, beating furiously with his hands and hat.

Red ants were swarming over the rocks in an endless, scurrying stream. The cave door was blocked up so the Tzutuhiles couldn't enter, but space

had been left for air. Through this the ants were coming. Jake's efforts were making no more impression than a straw stemming a raging tide.

The ants came on. For every dozen he crushed a hundred entered. They were the red ants of the jungle, the dread carnivorous insects that strip human flesh from bones. They had glistening eyes, waving antennae, eager jaws. They poured through the hole in the rocks, slipped through chinks, wriggled from underneath.

Martin and Wash began beating at them, too. But the ants came on. A thin line of them, the boldest vanguards, started up Jake's trousers. He slapped and a half dozen of the vicious insects clamped their mandibles in his skin. He brushed them away and they left red marks behind them.

Then Wash ran to his knapsack and drew a bottle out. He uncorked it, poured liquid in a thin stream around the entrance through which the ants were coming. It was strong carbolic acid for cauterizing wounds. Its pungent smell filled the air of the cave. It lay in an oily line on the floor.

The ants drove Jake and Martin back now. Their fight centered on brushing away those which had got on their clothes. They slapped them, dashed them to the earth before stepping over Wash's carbolic acid moat.

THE ANTS came on. The foremost of them reached the acid and paused. Others pushed from behind and crawled over them. These fell into the acid, fumed, shriveled and died. Still others fell on top of them. They died, too, their red bodies smoking; but their corpses made a bridge presently over which the rest could cross. The space behind the acid line in front of the cave doorway was filled with millions of swarming, crawling insects now. They were still pouring over the stones. They swept across the line in regiments of thousands.

"It's no use!" gasped Mary Parker. "They're coming. We can't stop them. They'll drive us out."

Mary screamed as the ants swarmed up her slim legs and bit her. They made red spots on her hands. She brushed them down, stamped on them, backed away. Jake ran across the cave and clawed at the other rock wall they had so carefully built. Wash and Martin helped him, knowing what he planned to do. The ants were driving them out into the darkness, out where the Indians waited with their deadly spears. And there was no help for it. "If only the Captain was here!" groaned Jake as he worked.

They got the stones out and quickly grabbed their knapsacks. Running, brushing the ants from their clothes as they went, they scrambled through the cave exit. Behind them, steady, persistent as doom itself, came the sound of a myriad feet.

But they knew they could outrun the insects. They didn't fear being caught when it came to mere speed. It was the black night itself that scared them. And they didn't know where to go.

There was no sound of the Indians, no faintest sign. They ran blindly for a hundred yards across an open space, until another rocky hillock loomed ahead.

"It's better than nothing," said Jake. "We've shaken those crawling varmints. We'll build up rocks and keep the Injuns—"

He stopped. A gasp of sheer amazement came from his lips. The others gasped, too. For there was a whisper in the air above them. A streak of brown stuff fell in the beam of Jake's flashlight. They tried to leap away. But they couldn't escape the meshes of the woven vine net that fell upon them.

It came down swiftly, layer on layer of it, criss-crossing around their heads and shoulders, dragging them down to the ground with its weight.

Above the swish of the net they

heard the shrill, triumphant cries of the Tzutuhiles ranged in the bushes on top of the wall. . . .

IN THE heart of Omoxotl, Captain Hazzard climbed desperately through a narrow, stifling flume. It was in the roof of the passage through which he'd been running when the red-hot lava had come.

He had seen the fumes of sulphurous smoke drawn up to this vent. He didn't know where it led. He wasn't sure he'd get through it. He'd climbed into it as the only alternative to being burned to death or captured by the Phoenix.

His skin was sore, burning. He knew now what had made John Roan's face have that reptilian look. The man had been chained, of course, in front of one of those furnace holes in the rocks. He had been exposed to these caustic, sulphurous gases for many days. It had taken all the oil from his skin, made it dead-looking.

The stuff was tearing at Captain Hazzard's throat. He stopped long enough to open his kit and slip on the small gas mask he always carried. He never went without it. It had helped him often. Its scientific respirator strained whatever good air there was. As the fumes got thicker his life depended on it.

The climb seemed endless. It was an hour before he finally felt the air getting cooler, the fumes thinning. Then at last the flume opened into a horizontal passage. Captain Hazzard flung himself exhausted on the rocks.

Suddenly he sat up. Tautness filled his whole being. His senses tingled. Those strange psychic whispers of danger to which he was given raced through his mind. Not danger to himself this time. But danger to those for whom he was responsible; danger to Mary Parker and the others left in the cave.

Hazzard stood in a frozen trance as the psychic whispers became stronger. He could see now dimly—see the pictures in his mind's eye of

what was happening; see Mary Parker, Martin, Jake and Wash being carried on poles through the jungle night by jubilant savages. He saw the strange barbaric procession entering the passage to the volcanic stronghold of the Phoenix.

Hazzard broke from his trance and ran along the passage with fear clutching his throat like an icy thing. He had got them into this. He had brought them to the jungle. He must get them out, save them somehow.

But a great earthquake tremor shook the rocks as though to mock his efforts, as though to show the helplessness of one human being in this place of titanic forces.

High above his head in the vaulted roof of the passage stones loosened and came down. They crashed at his feet. They made him trip and stumble. Then one struck his head and Hazzard pitched forward, still with the vision of calamity before his eyes.

CHAPTER IX

THE PHOENIX

MARY PARKER had never known such terror. She hung head downward on a long pole slung over the shoulders of two giant Tzutuhiles. Her wrists and ankles were lashed together above the top of the pole with palm fibers that cut cruelly.

All around her were Indians carrying torches. Their hideous faces shone. Their sharp spears gleamed. Their slitted black eyes were filled with venomous hatred as they looked her way. Each had a green jewel in the center of his forehead which seemed like a third baleful eye.

Behind her Jake, Martin and Wash were being carried on poles, too. All their equipment dangled from another pole carried by two savages who brought up the rear.

The procession was entering the rocky opening in the mountain. The Indians plunged in, walking in single

file, and Mary Parker began to choke. There were fumes in the air that stung her throat and face. The place was warm and stifling.

The trek continued up now into the heart of the mountain.

The Indians stopped at last and dropped her and the others joltingly on the floor of a big rock vault that was empty and had no door. The equipment was dropped, too, all but the rifles and automatics. Then the Indians shuffled out, leaving their prisoners tied.

But Martin spoke tensely the instant they had gone. "There's no door," he said. "No way to lock us up—and no guard posted. We can get these cords off and make a break. Roll over, Jake, and I'll untie you."

Jake twisted till his hands were close to Martin's fingers. Martin quickly got the cords loosened. Then, as soon as Jake's hands were free, he untied the others.

Martin moved cautiously toward the open entrance of the room, then stopped with a savage exclamation before he reached it.

Something more implacable than any door appeared suddenly between him and freedom. A wavering, eerie curtain of pulsating light glowed and shimmered from floor to ceiling between two black screens set close against the walls. The death curtain itself was being used to hold them in.

MARTIN backed away, his face twisted. Then he pointed toward the knapsacks. "We've still got the radio! We can get in touch with Crandall. We can ask him to send out a message that will reach the government of Guatemala. Maybe they'll send help—before it's too late."

The savages hadn't had the wits to remove that small box. The guns they had recognized and taken, but the radio looked harmless.

Martin crossed the floor and bent over the radio mechanism with feverish haste. It was built for telephonic communication, and was one of the

smallest, most compact two-way sets that the Hazzard Laboratories had created. Powerful chemical batteries made it run. Its range was seventy-five miles. Yet it took up a space no larger than a cigar box.

Martin unsnapped the earphones, clipped them on his head. He adjusted the small mouthpiece, clicked the switch and twirled the dials. "ML calling GC," he said. "Calling GC. Calling GC. . . ."

A thunderous volley of shots drowned out his speech. They came in quick succession. The radio set on the floor began to dance fantastically. Its tubes popped into splinters. Its cabinet split. Its parts flew in all directions as slugs hammered into it.

Martin whirled dumbfounded. Behind the curtain of light a dim figure stood—a man with a gun.

His face was indistinct until the light thinned a little in its weird ebb and flow. Then Martin glimpsed it.

The features were wizened. The head was shrunken, matted with long stringy hair like a mummy. The nose was hawklike. The skin was cracked by the fumes of the mountain into hideous reptilian scales. The eyes shone with evil intelligence from deep-sunken sockets.

The man didn't look quite human. The way his head rested on his shoulders, the way his shoulders humped, gave him the appearance of a hideous vulture. But his thin lips opened. He spoke in perfect English.

"Four shots, and I didn't miss once."

There was silence in the room, tense, expectant, till Mary Parker gasped:

"Who are you?"

The vulture man's evil gaze turned slowly, explored her from head to toe. He spoke finally with a mocking smile twisting his shriveled features. "Who I am is one of life's riddles," he said. "But—" he peered at each of them in turn, shaking now with silent, evil laughter—"you can call me the Phoenix."

The room was hushed again for seconds as all eyes focused on that sinister, skull-like face. The Phoenix! The man who had been responsible for those murders back in New York. The man who had tried to kill them. The man who had taken Mary's father prisoner and been the cause of their coming south.

The Phoenix touched his chest, lifted his wizened head. Emotion glared in his sunken eyes, when he thundered:

"I am the Phoenix, who, like the ancient bird of imperial Egypt, have got my strength from the living heart of fire. I am the master of Omoxotl, ruler of the great volcano—and I shall become the ruler of the world!"

Words burst suddenly from Mary Parker's lips. She couldn't be silenced longer. "What have you done with my father and Kurt Gordon?"

"What!" The thoughts of the Phoenix seemed to come back reluctantly from intoxicating vistas of egotistic grandeur. His eyes fixed themselves on the girl again and his harsh laughter filled the room. "I'll take you to him," he said, "if you want to see him?"

THERE was something in his tone; something about his words that made the girl whiten. But she moved forward to the curtain of death, going as close as she dared.

The Phoenix stepped to the side of the room and touched something. "I'll let the girl through," he said, "but if any man tries to follow her, I'll shoot him dead. You've seen how good my aim is!"

The curtain faded. Mary Parker walked through as in a trance. None of the others followed. They read death in the Phoenix's eyes. Then the curtain came on again, shimmering as before. The man and the girl moved off together.

Seen close, the Phoenix's features were so horrible that Mary Parker thought she might faint. They were like a shrunken mask of intolerable

evil; like all the sins and cruelties of man merged into one hideous face.

The girl kept her eyes away. She shrank from any contact with that shriveled body. She followed his shuffling footsteps until they came to a small opening in a wall of rock.

"Through there," the Phoenix said. "You can see him. The third from the end."

Mary Parker looked and her heart seemed to twist inside her as if it were skewered on a knife. Her eyes widened. Her hands felt cold. She was looking into a room where the chained slaves toiled. And the man who labored third from the end nearest her in the row before the fire holes in the rock was her father.

Her father—emaciated, sweating, corpse-like! She knew! She could tell in spite of the way he'd changed. There were steel rings around his ankles, chains attached to them.

Mary Parker called out in a choking voice. "Father, it's Mary! Father—look—it's Mary!"

Only for one brief moment did the man turn his head. Then it was more like a reflex movement than a conscious action. There was no awareness in his sunken eyes. They were stupid, vacant, glazed.

And Mary Parker broke into a sudden spasm of hysteria. She screamed. She turned and struck the Phoenix. She clawed at his horrible face with her nails. She lashed at him with her tightly clenched fists.

The Phoenix didn't give ground. He merely snarled in his throat and struck back. He slapped her face with blow after blow that sounded like whips cracking. He drove her from him with a cold fury that made his eyes look like a devil's. He continued to slap her till she fell on her knees before him, her golden hair streaming, her face white.

She lifted her hands to her smarting cheeks, moaned on the stone floor of the passage outside the room where her father toiled.

THE PHOENIX bent over her trembling body like a vulture ready to feast. His eyes were blazing, malevolent. "This is a man's world. This mountain is a place where important work is being done. Work, do you hear! Great work—work that the ages won't forget. And you are useless. You are a girl, weak, foolish. There is no food for useless mouths in this mountain. But—" he paused and looked down at her as though giving consideration to a problem—"there is a useful way to get rid of you."

She paid no attention to what he was saying. Sobs wrenched her slim shoulders. The Phoenix went on with grating emphasis.

"My Indians have customs carried down from long-dead ancestors. They are nature worshipers, animists. The beasts, the birds, the reptiles, even the rocks to them are sacred. They have their especial fetishes and idols. It will please them to give you to the sacred serpents of Omoxotl; the great white pythons that have lived near the heart of the mountain since long before the coming of Alvarado. For centuries the Indians have fed them, made living sacrifices to them, thrown their enemies to them so that the wrath of Terror's Shadow might be appeased. But you will be the first white girl given to the White Lords of Omoxotl. To the Indians it should be a time of especial rejoicing."

Some of his words reached the girl's consciousness. She raised startled, terrified eyes. What was he saying? White pythons! Lords of Omoxotl! She cried out suddenly, gasping in horror, lifting herself to her feet.

The Phoenix looked pleased that his words had filled her with fresh terror. There was an inhuman, a sadistic light in his eyes now. She had struck him, scratched him, given insult to his megalomaniacal ego. Her abject fear was like a balm to his pride.

"They like only living things," he said gloatingly, "warm flesh still quivering."

Mary Parker fainted mercifully, unable to stand any more bombardments of horror after the strain she had endured. Two Indians took her back to the prison room. Then the Phoenix summoned other Indians with chains. These he exhibited to Jake, Wash and Martin.

"We have them always available," he said cruelly. "The work is such that the workers fall by the way, making room for others. There is no unemployment problem in Omoxotl."

Hazzard's three aides considered making a break for it as the Phoenix switched off the light curtain to bring Mary Parker in. But a dozen Indians with knives and spears stood grimly in the doorway. To fight now would be suicidal. Nothing would be gained by throwing their lives away. And they sensed that Captain Hazzard wouldn't want it. Mysterious psychic forces told them that he was still alive somewhere. The only way they could help him, cooperate with him, and help themselves, was to wait till some opportunity presented itself.

But there was a fearful finality about the feel of those steel rings on their ankles. With the Indians walking beside them, holding spears against their bodies, they were taken to the room with the furnacelike holes.

Two places were empty and at the third a slave had collapsed. His head lolled horribly. His mouth was open. His tongue, black and swollen, was thrust through cracking lips. He was dead, killed by the fearful labor, and his body was removed to make room for Jake to take his place.

The Phoenix had come in, too. He looked on coldly while the Indians chained the new slaves in the toiling row. The others hadn't stopped their work for a moment. They held long ladlelike implements. They thrust these into the fire holes with some sort of brownish rock in them. Every

few minutes they drew the ladles out, plunged them into a vat of liquid for a moment, then thrust them back into the holes again. They kept this up till the rocks turned black. Then they dumped the rocks to one side and began all over with fresh ones.

Jake was given one of the long-handled ladles, together with a chunk of rock. He was told by the Phoenix to follow the movements of the others. Indians dressed in hideous python skins, clutching long whips, stood around with masklike faces.

Jake knew they were there to keep the slaves busy. But he was curious about the rocks and ladles. He stared at the Phoenix, pointed to his chunk of rock. "What's that for?" he asked grimly.

"Questions are forbidden!" the Phoenix snapped. He made a quick gesture. The nearest Indian brought his whip down on Jake's back in a blow that cut the skin cruelly. Jake didn't wince. But he thrust his ladle sullenly into the fire and whispered to Wash, who was chained close to him: "I'd rather be a horned toad in hell than fork my fuzztail permanent with this herd of sour-bellies."

CHAPTER X

ALTAR OF THE PYTHON MEN

CAPTAIN HAZZARD, twenty-four hours later, was still lost in the mazelike passages of Omoxotl. There had been hours of desperate searching, of exploring air flumes and narrow crevices. Hours of sounding the lava walls for possible spots where an opening might be made.

His psychic senses told him that Jake and Wash and Mary Parker were still alive. He had established telepathic contact with Martin. He knew now something of what had happened. The three men were chained in the room with the slaves. Through Martin's eyes he had even got an impression of the Phoenix; of a personality more fiend than man.

Of Mary Parker he knew only that she had gone out from the prison room to see her father and had been brought back in a faint. He had no inkling of the fearful fate that lay ahead of her.

And neither Martin nor anyone else could help him with his immediate problem. That was to find a way out of the tomblike rock cavern in which he was trapped.

He had tried almost everything. He had burned smoke powders and watched the way the vapor drifted in an effort to discover drafts that might lead to hidden openings. He had found several, but they had been only minute cracks. In sheer desperation he began to climb as high as he could get on one side of the wall. As he climbed he swept his flashlight over the ceiling.

It was thus that he discovered a small black hole in the roof of the vault. Did it lead to another, higher chamber, or was it merely a pocket left by a falling rock? Hazzard didn't know. But at the risk of a bone-shattering plunge he climbed up to it. Reaching out from a narrow ledge he thrust his arm in the black air pocket. Excitement gripped him instantly. There was a faint draft there.

Tensely, he took one of the small bombs from his belt. He set its chemical fuse to the maximum explosion point of five minutes, then wedged it in the hole. He wasn't sure it would give him time to get down. But he must risk it. He descended hastily, taking long chances. At the last, as seconds flew by, he jumped to the stone floor from a height of thirty feet, bending his knees as he landed to break the shock. The instant he hit he turned and fled down the passage and swung himself flat.

The explosion overhead filled the corridor with shattering, ear-splitting echoes. Showers of rock came down. Great boulders fell a few feet behind him. And after the explosion Hazzard's pulses raced.

For there was a gaping hole in the

roof now; a black opening large enough to admit his body. He climbed up once more, squeezed through the space he'd blasted, and found himself in another chamber. There was a tight feeling around his heart as he ran along it. Since the mountain was honeycombed with passages this might be a blind one, too.

But a faint glow appeared ahead at the end of five minutes. Daylight this time! Daylight after hours of wandering in darkness. The sight of that opening in the rocks gave Captain Hazzard new vigor.

He crept forward cautiously. He wasn't sure where he was, or when he might run into prowling savages. But as soon as he reached the opening he saw that caution was for the moment needless. He was far up on the side of the great peak. Below him was the gorge through which he'd followed the Indian. Spreading out was a vast panorama of the jungle, with the Espiritu Santo range on the far horizon. Hazzard began moving along a narrow ledge on the face of the mountain. Cautiously but swiftly he descended, climbing down toward a spot where he had glimpsed what appeared to be another passage mouth.

But it took time to reach it. The going was harder than he had thought. He had to slip down the bare face of the rock in spots, hanging on precariously. When he did get near the opening he paused abruptly and listened.

From out of that cavelike hole in the rock came weird, barbaric music, the sound of many voices, wailing, chanting. It seemed far off, ghostly. It rose and fell. It had a persistent rhythm. And to Hazzard, who was sensitive to the tones and moods of even the most savage races, there was in it a note of unearthly horror.

MARY PARKER, too, heard that chanting. But it wasn't far away from her. It didn't reach her ears through hundreds of feet of

They lifted Mary Parker and carried her to the python pit.



rocky passage. It was all around her. In front—in back—beside her, beating against her eardrums in wave on wave of shuddering dread.

It seemed to be bearing her along on an evil tide of sound. But it was the Indians themselves who carried her. She wasn't slung beneath a pole now. She sat on a royal couchlike litter of ocelot skin trimmed with the waving plumes of the sacred quetzal.

She, too, was dressed in the bright-green feathers. She wore a cloak of them. The Tzutuhiles had made her disrobe and put this feathery garment on her slender body. It hung from her white shoulders all the way to her ankles. Over her lustrous blond hair they had slipped a band of gleaming gold ornamented with a bright-green jewel. It was the sacred emerald of the Tzutuhiles. The flawless gem that came from the rocks of this wild country. She was being borne along like a queen in state. Four chanting Python Men held the corners of the litter.

But her hands and feet were bound. She was not a queen in reality, but a slave. A slave of horrible death on her way to serve her awful masters.

She knew who those masters were. The Phoenix had told her. She knew, and yet her mind could not meet a thing of such unspeakable horror. It shied away from it, drew back dazed, dared not even contemplate it. Twice in the past few minutes she had nearly fainted away.

But close at hand, bringing that horror home to her, was an Indian with hands bound and head bent walking just ahead of her litter. He must have sinned against the Phoenix. The quivering features of his face, the look in his eyes, stabbed like sharp blades across her nerve fibers. The masters whom she went to serve were to have him, too.

THE procession moved on singing, carrying torches in the dim catacombs of the mountain. Mary Parker lay on the litter with a white

face and eyes dark with steadily mounting dread.

They came at last to a chamber that was roofed high like a vault. There was a rocky floor in front. Toward the back the floor ended sharply, giving way to a steep-sided pit. In the air of this big room was a faint, musky scent that made the girl's body tremble.

The singing ceased in a moment. The Python Men ranged themselves around the edge of the pit. In the silence that followed, Mary Parker heard a slithering, scraping whisper of sound that was hateful, spine-chilling.

Drawn by a dread fascination that was stronger than will, she turned her head and stared down when the Python Men brought her close to the edge of the pit.

There under the light of the torches she glimpsed the scaly white bodies of the snakes. They were moving slowly, curling, unwinding, writhing over each other—a squirming, horrible mass of giant pythons, bleached almost to milky whiteness because the sun had not reached them or their ancestors for untold ages.

They thrust their great heads up. They glared with their cold green eyes. Their forked tongues flickered. Their scaly necks swayed, dropped back, rose again.

The Indians took their bound comrade and suddenly hurled him down into the pit among those writhing, twisting reptilian bodies.

Mary Parker dropped forward on the litter, hiding her eyes, stifling the scream in her throat among the green feathers of her robe.

But she couldn't shut out the awful sounds that came up from the pit. She couldn't close her ears to those hideous cries, those snappings and crunchings. It was only when the sounds reached their climax, when two of the great pythons had thrown their coils tightly around the Indian's body and were crushing the

life out of him that Mary Parker again mercifully fainted away.

When preparations for the horrible feast in the pit began, when one of the pythons drew into a corner with his human prey to crush it and knead it, Mary lay unconscious on the litter. She didn't feel the rough savage hands that clutched her limp body and raised her slowly aloft.

Then the chanting started again. A high priest of the animist cult lifted the green jewel from Mary's forehead. They held it up on a feathered arrow, walked with it to the serpent pit and made other mystic passes.

The pythons thrust their ghostly heads up again as if their cold brains told them that another victim was to be thrown to them. These walls had echoed to that strange chanting often before. Never had it failed to mean food for the snakes.

The chanting was louder, deeper, more fervent. The priests were trembling with an emotion close to madness as they lifted Mary Parker and carried her slowly to the edge of the pit.

CHAPTER XI

HELL'S CONTROL ROOM

THEN it happened—a thing that made the Python men freeze into rigid statues of abject fear. A light glowed suddenly in the pit of the serpents. A light as bright as a ruby and as red as blood. It flared out of the semi-darkness, making the pythons hiss and crawl away.

The Indians hadn't heard the faint stir of the tiny cone that sailed over their heads. They hadn't seen it in their preoccupation with the awful ceremony being enacted.

It had landed on a python's writhing body which deadened the sound when it fell. An instant after it hit it burst into flame, spurting red fire at its narrow tip. And now it was burning weirdly, fearfully to the Indians' eyes. In its glow the white pythons seemed to be bathed in blood.

The Indians drew back staring. The red light seemed to indicate that Omoxotl was angry. Its sudden appearance was a sign that they had done something wrong.

And as they stood, filled with superstitious dread, staring at that strange blood-red fire, something moved across the stone floor behind them, rolling almost to their feet.

It came to rest finally close to the edge of the serpent's pit. It was a silvery ball about the size of an egg. There were holes in it. As it rolled a slender black cord hardly larger than a thread unwound from it, and trailed behind it.

The Python Men didn't see the cord. They didn't know where the silver ball had come from or what it was. They stared stupidly from it to the flare in the pit.

Then a sound rose from their very feet—a thin, ghostly voice, as though some spectral being dwelt in the floor of the room.

"*Nihongi! Nihongi!*" It was one of several words common to most of the Indian dialects of Guatemala. "*Nihongi!*" the voice said again. "Go!" Then the voice rose till it seemed to fill the whole chamber. "Leave the maiden! Go! Go!"

The Indians broke suddenly into a wild stampede of terror. With contorted faces, waving arms, rolling eyes they turned from the pythons' pit and fled toward the door. The evil, blood-red glow of the strange fire seemed to follow them. Their panic increased with every step they took. Omoxotl was angry. Omoxotl had spoken. They had seen his fiery eye. They had heard his awful voice. He had spurned their sacrificial offering.

They bolted through the door of the room, yelling, clawing, knocking each other down, trailing their green feathers. They let their torches fall and sputter. In a surging, frenzied human wave, they turned left and rushed down the long rock passage up which they had come.

As the sound of their thudding feet diminished, a shadow detached itself from a dark recess at the right of the door. A tall figure strode quickly into the sacred pythons' room.

It was Captain Hazzard, and he went at once to the prostrate girl. He bent over her, saw that she was still alive. Before picking her up he paused long enough to rewind the black cord on the tiny spheroid loud-speaker that had saved her life. It was made of aluminum, light as a feather, but could amplify the human voice many times.

Hazzard had developed it, together with a buttonhole microphone, as a means of communicating with friends or assistants in out-of-the-way places. The spheroid speaker slipped easily into his pocket.

He lifted the girl in his arms then, turned and moved quickly out of the room and strode after the fleeing Python Men. There was no time to lose. When they told the Phoenix what had happened the Phoenix would grow suspicious and would start an investigation. But if Hazzard could reach the part of the mountain where the Phoenix lived there might be a chance to make some investigations of his own while the panic-stricken savages held their master's attention. It would take some minutes to convince them that Omoxotl wasn't angry.

He broke into a run, swinging the girl in his powerful arms. The sound of the Indians was far away now. Burdened as he was, he couldn't expect to catch up. But he kept them within earshot, ran down dark, twisting passages, crossed natural vaults in the mountain. Some few of the savages had clung to their torches. When the passage was straight he could see their glow and this helped him to follow.

Mary stirred in his arms presently. The draft on her face was reviving her. And, even though she was unconscious, the magnetic power of Captain Hazzard's brain and body

seemed to be driving the clouds of horror from her mind.

By the time they reached the level of the chamber where the chained slaves toiled, Mary's eyes were open. Hazzard had come closer to the torches of the Python Men. In their light, Mary Parker got a glimpse of his face. Her hands clutched him. Her voice came in a thin whisper like some one talking from the grave.

"Captain Hazzard!" There was hope, disbelief, amazement in her tone.

He nodded; then said: "Let me know when you feel strong enough to walk."

She said nothing for a few minutes. Her body relaxed and she seemed to sink into a trance. He could guess how weak she must feel after those moments of unforgettable horror.

Suddenly she roused herself. "I can walk now."

He wasn't sure of it, but he let her feet slip to the floor, and in an instant she was running along beside him.

"Hurry!" she whispered. "I've seen my father. He's here—alive. But they're torturing him. He's dying. If there's any way we can save him, we must!"

The Python Men had paused now. He could see their torches flaring down at the end of a long rock corridor. He could hear their voices jabbering. They must be clamoring outside the private chambers of the Phoenix—to tell him of the dread thing that had happened. Here was the opportunity for which he had hoped.

He moved stealthily toward the frenzied group of green-robed Tzutuhiles. Other Indians were coming from all directions; slipping out of doors and passages, running to see what the excitement was about.

As one door opened, Hazzard caught a glimpse of a big, lighted room filled with strange machinery. When the Indian who had come out of it disappeared in the direction of

the yelling group, Hazzard whispered:

"This way. Come!"

HIS army automatic was in his right hand now. In his left was another of those walnut-size bombs. As a last resort, he stood ready to fling it to save their lives. But the big room was empty except for one man, a slave chained before a great work table strewn with delicate instruments.

The man raised startled eyes. He was Teutonic in appearance, small, intelligent, with a blond-bearded face. There was suffering written on it, deep-seated fear in his small blue eyes. He looked at Hazzard and the girl as though he saw two ghosts.

Hazzard put his finger to his lips. He understood the situation at a glance. Here was one of the Phoenix's trained technicians. A great brain probably, a scientist or scholar who had somehow fallen in his hands. The Phoenix made slaves of civilized men, chained them, worked them to death under the cruel whips of his barbarous Python Men.

Hazzard spoke to the bearded worker in English and the man answered with a Germanic accent: "Vat iss it you are doing here? Und der girl! Don't you know der Venix vill kill you! Get outd. Run!"

In clipped sentences, Hazzard told who he was and what had happened, and he saw hope flare in the chained man's eyes. The man said his name was Beckhardt. He was a chemist working for a mining company and had been captured by the Tzutuhiles, then brought here.

Captain Hazzard placed a chair for Mary Parker.

Beckhardt waved his short arms and whispered hoarsely. "Der Venix iss mad—mad vid a crazy ego dat makes him vant to rule der vorld. But he iss a great genius. Look!"

Hazzard stared around the room with its strange assortment of levers,

dials, huge metal coils and giant valves. It looked more like a power substation in a great city than a chamber deep in the heart of a volcano. It was incredible, the work of a great brain, a mighty energy. There were whirring dynamos, electric lights, huge switchboards. But what of the power to run all this?

Hazzard guessed the startling secret even before Beckhardt stabbed one stubby finger dramatically at the floor. "Down dere. All of it. Dere in der volcano's crater!"

That was the answer. The Phoenix had harnessed the subterranean fires of Omoxotl. Hazzard knew that daring engineers had proposed such a thing. They had theorized, pointed out in scientific papers that there was enough power in the average volcano, enough heat units to run a mighty modern city. But no one had dared act upon the idea—except the Phoenix. It had taken a half-crazed brain, a man obsessed with limitless ambition, a man who held human life cheaply. It had taken a personality half genius and half fiend.

Captain Hazzard stepped to the wall of the room where there was a huge diagram in a frame. A diagram of Omoxotl, showing the course of the crater, its depth and structure. And here before Hazzard's startled eyes were the details of the vast engineering task. The Phoenix had thrown a giant valve across the crater, five hundred feet below its summit. He had capped the volcano, controlling the mighty gas pressure, as lesser engineers cap oilwells.

Steel girders such as are used to build bridges had been set in the rock, reinforced, roofed over with other girders and plates of steel riveted together. The valve in the center was worked by a system of giant worm gears operated by an electric motor.

Hazzard shuddered when he considered the toll of human life that this vast project must have taken. How many workers had fallen screaming into the fiery depths of the

crater? How many others had perished in the stifling gases. And how many thousands, how many millions of dollars had this thing cost?

Mary Parker sat motionless in her chair, watching the two men.

HAZZARD'S excited gaze continued to run over the design, comparing it with the machinery in the room. He saw the delicate instrument under a glass case that made second-by-second recordings of the pressure of the subterranean gases. He saw that it operated a safety control attached to the great central worm gear.

This gear was in ceaseless motion, opening and closing the huge valve, letting gas escape or shutting it in, to keep the pressure constant. It could be varied by a rheostat. Except for this the mountain might blow up, or the pressure that the Phoenix needed in his work might vanish if the subterranean fires sank below a certain point.

Then Hazzard saw another control, another series of lines on the diagram. These showed how the pressure could be built up by letting water from an underground river fall into the crater. The water turned to live steam before it struck bottom. The steam turned to superheated gases.

Hazzard tensed suddenly as his mind grasped what would happen if the one control was closed and the other opened. He remembered the great volcano, Krakatao, in the strait of Sundra, near Java. Sea water had fallen into Kragatao's crater and it had erupted with an appalling loss of life, blowing a whole island to bits and filling the atmosphere of the entire earth with dust motes. Yes, the Phoenix was playing with forces so great that they staggered the imagination.

And what of his light-wave curtain? Hazzard spoke to Beckhardt about it. The German chemist shrugged. "I do not know. Only der

Venix knows. But dere are pabers—dere in dat safe iff a man could open it. Dere are plans showing it. Maybe iff—"

But Hazzard had already darted away. He was kneeling before the safe, moving the dials, listening to the tumblers. He must have more knowledge. Their lives might depend on what he learned in the few moments left to him. He took a silencer from his pocket and slipped it over the barrel of his automatic. He laid the gun on the floor beside him. He would shoot—shoot to kill if he was interrupted.

Mary Parker's dark-blue eyes followed Captain Hazzard's every move.

And in a moment he had the safe open. In a moment his tense hands were shuffling through the papers. Then he found it, found what he wanted. He ran across the room to Beckhardt. They studied them together. But Beckhardt could make nothing of them. He didn't have the vast training, the super-technical skill of Wash MacGowen.

It was Hazzard himself who understood those diagrams and complex figures. Wash had been right in assuming that the thing might be atomic. The Phoenix had used the power of Omoxotl to break down individual atoms into their component electrons. Sending the electrons into space on alpha rays from a Roentgen tube he had built up an atomic barrage of deadly power, a protoplasmic oxidizer that congealed the blood and brought death quickly. It was a thing of horror, of far-reaching potentialities.

And there was literature in the safe to show that the Phoenix intended to develop this into a weapon that would make the nations of the earth bow to his will. Through agents, he was corresponding even now with certain European governments. He hadn't let the secret out of his hands as yet; but he had drawn up plans of the whole world as one vast corporate state with headquarters in

Omxotl and himself as supreme dictator.

Here was the dream of a megalomaniac; but a dream that could spread untold misery and horror if it wasn't nipped in the bud. Hazzard knew that the small light machines tried out in New York and in the air were only the beginning.

Mary Parker called a swift warning as one of the Python Men suddenly came through the door. The savage stopped in amazement and opened his mouth to shout.

Without an instant's hesitation, knowing that he was acting in the interests of humanity, Captain Hazzard sent a bullet from his silenced gun into the Indian's brain. He rose swiftly and pulled the body out of sight. Then he drew a ring from the savage's belt and found a key that unlocked the shackles on Beckhardt's ankles.

Beckhardt came forward, a slave no longer, with deep-heartfelt gratitude shining in his small blue eyes. Hazzard thrust one of his tiny, deadly bombs into the chemist's hand. He showed him how to use it, then said:

"Stay here—you and Mary Parker. Don't use that bomb unless you have to—but use it if you must to save her life. I'm going to leave my automatic with her."

"Und vare are you going?"

"To try and free some other slaves."

Hazzard handed his army Colt to Mary Parker. "In case anything should happen to me," he said, "it will be better if you have this?"

She understood. "Yes. I'll use it—on myself—if they try to take me back to the pythons."

He knew she would. Nothing could make her face again that nightmarish horror. Hazzard went to the door then, looked out, and stepped swiftly into the passage. Moving as stealthily as a shadow, he hurried along the dark corridor toward the room where the slaves toiled.

CHAPTER XII

THE FURY OF OMOXOTL

JUST inside the doorway stood a huge Indian, dressed in a hideous python-skin hood, and holding a steel-shafted spear.

There was no time for finesse. Other savages were already drifting back to their posts, and the group of Tzutuhiles who had fled from the python pit in terror were coming out of the Phoenix's private chamber with their frenzy calmed. In another few minutes Hazzard knew that the Phoenix would begin an investigation of that weird happening at the pit. In another few minutes every savage in those vast catacombs would be warned and alert.

Hazzard flung himself recklessly on the tall, armed guard. He hoped to knock him out, quiet him, and grab the spear before two other guards with whips, standing in the far side of the big room, came running.

But for once Hazzard had underestimated the lightning rapidity of savage reflexes. As well try to take a dozing jaguar by surprise as one of these grim Tzutuhiles.

The man turned in the flash of a split-second; turned before Hazzard's hands had touched his body. Like the claw of a striking cat, the spear flashed out. The Indian snarled deep in his throat. Hazzard leaped aside as the spear point brushed him. Its steel blade sliced his clothes. He felt the Indian's hot breath on his face.

Then Hazzard struck straight at that evil face. His blow would have felled a white man; but it failed even to stun the savage. The Tzutuhile let out an angry roar. Head down he came at Hazzard with the spear again. And behind him now Hazzard heard a determined patter of feet as the two other guards came running.

Desperate, Hazzard, took a chance at strategy. He gave ground for a moment before the spearman. He turned and fled as though in terror.

He heard the man's steps close behind him. He gambled his life on seconds. Just as the Indian drove the point forward to spear his back, Hazzard leaped aside. His hand flashed out. He caught the spear as it shot by him. He gave a savage tug, then tripped him and sent him sprawling on the floor.

The two guards with the whips were close now. Hazzard wrenched the spear from the fallen man's hands. As the Indian leaped up and came at him like a raging beast, Hazzard brought the weapon down on his skull.

He did not even wait to see the man fall. He whirled with the spear in his hand. The two guards had discarded their whips and had drawn long knives from their belts. They came at him from different directions.

The spear flashed out twice, its steel point gleaming like lightning. Twice, and the Python Men fell with limp-hanging arms and broken shoulders. Hazzard stunned them both with blows on the head.

Then he snatched a key ring from the man he had first felled. Quickly, deftly, knowing that he had only a few minutes to work; he went down the line of slaves before the fire holes and unlocked them. Jake Cole first, then Wash, then Martin. Then other men whose names he did not know. Finally he reached Mary's father.

Some of the slaves took a few stumbling steps and collapsed at this sudden freedom. It was too much for them after the routine they had known.

"Help them!" said Hazzard. "Quick. Follow me. We've got to get back to the control room."

A mad, a desperate plan was shaping itself in Hazzard's brain. He must reach the control room of the lost city again. He must have Wash there to help him.

Already the noise that the guards had made had attracted attention. As he stepped into the corridor three more Indians came running toward

him. They paused only an instant, then, with shrill cries, leaped forward holding their spears. Jake, Wash, and Martin, helping the slaves who could not walk, were close behind.

HAZZARD flung pellets of tear gas which hindered, but did not stop the Indians' attack. With streaming eyes and distorted faces they came on through it. They hurled themselves on Hazzard and the others. For a moment there was a mad, hand-to-hand conflict.

Jake got one of the spears away and bashed a Python Man over the head with it. He swore like a mule driver. Hazzard knocked a second savage out with a blow to the body. But the third Indian let his spear fly and it caught one of the men who had been chained, in the neck. It pierced him, almost sliced his head from his body. The man, who a moment before had had the hope of freedom, went down with his troubles ended forever.

Hazzard plunged on along the passage, the others after him. They reached the door of the control room as a howling mob of Indians, aware now that a break had been made by the slaves, came charging from the direction of the Phoenix's chambers.

Their spears whistled through the air even before Hazzard had marshaled his men through the control room door. When the last man was in, he slammed it, shoved a bolt home. He had noticed this before he left it. It was part of his plan.

He turned to Wash, and explained briefly what he had discovered about the death curtain. While the Indians beat on the door, he showed Wash the plans he had taken from the safe.

Wash knitted his brows as calmly as though death were not howling outside. "Amazing," he said. "Extraordinary. You were right, Captain, I shouldn't have been afraid to follow any line of reasoning, however wild it might seem. This thing utilizes the force released from the break-

down of atoms. The force is discharged between two terminals and carried on alpha rays. We shall have to call in the quantum theory to explain it."

Wash was like a school-master giving a lecture, so absorbed in his subject now that he had forgotten all about their danger. Hazzard brought him back to reality.

"I know, Walsh," he said tensely. "It's atomic all right. Alpha rays are the carrying agent. The point is, can we build up a defense against it?"

"I don't know," said Wash. "It would take some research."

"Research!" Hazzard laughed grimly. "There are a bunch of Indians out there waiting to do some research with spears and find out what our insides are made of. No, Wash. We've got to act quickly. We've got to take a chance."

"But how—"

"Look. We've got to break down the polarization of the carrying agent. We can't hope to touch the atomic factor itself. We don't know enough about it. But mightn't we blast through it, upset the polarization with a dose of the same poison? I mean, use more alpha rays to cut through and bisect the carriers?"

Dawning comprehension made Wash's eyes glow brightly. He rubbed his long chin excitedly. "It's possible, Captain—barely possible. But even that would take time. We'd have to have an X-ray outfit."

"Over there," said Hazzard. "But it's too big to carry. We need something portable. Can you strip it down, Wash, make it lighter and still have it work?"

"Time," said Wash. "I can do anything—given time."

"There is no time," snapped Captain Hazzard. "Get busy on that X-ray, Wash. Leave the rest to me." With a light in his eyes that even Wash couldn't interpret, Hazzard strode toward those two controls that held

in leash the mighty power of the great volcano. The one operating the worm gear in the giant valve; the other which could send a river pouring into the crater. He swung the rheostat needle all the way over.

Delicate mechanism inside the glass case was transmitted to the huge electric motor, multiplied a thousand times, till tons of metal revolved as the great valve in the crater cap moved shut.

Then Hazzard opened that other control till a quivering needle on a clock-faced dial registered a flow of water. Tons of it began pouring down into the crater. Hazzard was beginning the greatest gamble of his life.

He turned and left the controls for a moment. Something was thudding on the outside of the control-room door. The Python Men had a log battering-ram and were going at it systematically.

There was a small sliding panel in the door, a peep-hole covered with a meshed grating. There were indications that the Phoenix had planned to use this room to withstand an assault in case his Indians ever became rebellious.

Hazzard opened the peep-hole and stared out. He saw a sea of fierce copper faces. Even if Wash succeeded in condensing the X-ray outfit so they could carry it, it seemed impossible that they would ever get through this cordon of howling asavages.

BUT the Indians were stepping aside now to make way for someone. They were opening a long path. Through it came a hideous, vulture-like figure. A man with a wizened face and evilly burning eyes. The Phoenix!

Hazzard waited breathlessly. The Phoenix came straight up to the control-room door. He spoke in a quiet voice as though addressing a business confrere. "I see, my friend, that you have succeeded in stirring up quite a bit of trouble. I believe I

have the pleasure of speaking to the famous Captain Hazzard!"

"And you're the Phoenix," said Hazzard grimly. "The man who thinks he can conquer the whole world."

The Phoenix's eyes darted venomous fire. His thin lips curled back from his yellow teeth. "Fool! Because you have succeeded in barricading yourself in that room with a handful of slaves, you think you are in a position now to mock the Phoenix." The Phoenix drew himself up in fierce, bombastic pride. "You cannot even make terms with me. My Indians will batter the door down presently. Every one of your party will be tortured to death. . . . But, because I value the safety of certain instruments I have there, I'm going to offer you an alternative. Open the door, come out quietly, all of you and you will be allowed to live in slavery."

Captain Hazzard laughed. "What you say about the safety of your instruments is well put. And your Indians won't batter this door down. I'm going to stop them. Once in the past hour they tasted the wrath of Omoxotl. My red flare and my projected voice drove them out of the pythons' pit. Now, by the wrath of Omoxotl, I'm going to drive them away from this door."

"They're superstitious morons," said the Phoenix. "But I am with them now. Nothing you can say to them will have the slightest effect."

"No!" Captain Hazzard's voice was mocking. He spoke suddenly, a few clipped sentences in the Indian dialect. "Go. Leave this door. Let me come out in peace—or the wrath of Omoxotl will descend upon you. I am a white god, a greater god than the Phoenix."

The jeering voices of the Indians rose. They drove their battering ram against the door more fiercely as the Phoenix spurred them on.

Hazzard then spoke in English, addressing the Phoenix. "I've closed the

valve in the crater. I've let loose the underground river."

"What!" A note of shocked amazement was in the Phoenix's tone. He came nearer the door with his lips sliding away from his teeth again.

Hazzard said: "Listen."

There was a rumbling at his feet. A rumbling that came from vast depths in the earth, a rumbling that seemed to make the whole great mountain quiver.

"The voice of Omoxotl!" said Captain Hazzard.

A SICKLY, terrible pallor spread over the wizened face of the Phoenix. He commenced to tremble violently. "Shut it off, you fool!" he screamed. "Shut it off—or you will blow us all to destruction."

Without waiting for Hazzard to answer, he spoke to the Indians. They renewed their attack on the metal door.

Hazzard shouted: "Stop! Stop! The wrath of Omoxotl will be on your heads. The voice of Omoxotl speaks already."

Some of the Python Men left their places at the log battering-ram and stepped away. The Phoenix drew a revolver from his pocket and waved it.

"Back! Back," he shouted in their dialect. When the Indians didn't move, he deliberately opened fire on them. Hatefully, ruthlessly he sent bullets into their eyes, into their chests. The Phoenix was like a madman now. His eyes rolled. There was a froth on his thin lips. His yellow teeth were like the fangs of a jackal. Fear of him bit into the Indians' hearts, fear greater even than their fear of the mountain. Sullenly they clung to the battering-ram and shoved it at the door.

The room was shaking now. But not because of their blows. It was shaking because the whole mountain was shaking, because all hell was bubbling, seething down there thousands of feet below the rock. It was

shaking because river water continued to flow into the crater and there was no way for the pent-up gases to get out.

Hazzard leaped back to the control board. Dial needles were quivering, trembling like mad things. A red liquid was pulsing furiously in an upright tube with coils below it. He turned the rheostat controlling the giant worm gear a little, opened the great valve a few feet.

A roaring shriek of gas escaping under terrific pressure came from somewhere in the mountain. It was a sound that none of them would forget as long as they lived. All the furies in hell seemed to be screaming at once. The floor shook. The walls rattled.

Outside the door Hazzard heard the frenzied, terrified shouts of the Indians. Their shouts were punctuated by the staccato reports of the Phoenix's automatic as he murdered them brutally, drove the rest back to the battering ram.

Hazzard looked across the room and saw Wash working over the X-ray outfit. Bent, absorbed, Wash's face was as owlish and placid as though he were working over some interesting problem in the Long Island laboratory. He looked at Jake. The big cowboy was chewing gum lazily. His deadpan face was the same and usual. And Martin was doing his best to comfort Mary Parker.

But she didn't need much comforting now. She had her father with her. There were tears in her eyes, tears of joy. The thought of death didn't seem to trouble her as long as her dad could go out with her. Hazzard felt a lump rise in his throat. The lives of these people depended on him. He was taking long chances. He was gambling unmercifully. He was playing with death to keep death at bay.

He looked out the peephole. Most of the Python Men had fled except for the group that terror of the Phoenix had held together. The corpses

of the men he had shot lay slumped on the floor. Hazzard wondered at the awful fear he must have inspired.

Then Wash spoke above the banshee shriek of the great mountain.

"It's ready, Captain. This is about as light as I can make it."

He hefted the X-ray cabinet, which he had stripped of all non-essentials. In twenty minutes of patient work he had put the experience of a lifetime into these changes. He had shifted delicate tubes, changed wiring, disconnected and reconnected batteries.

Hazzard picked the instrument up. It weighed about sixty pounds but he could carry it easily.

He did a strange, desperate thing then—the climax of his hairbreadth plan of escape. He walked to the control board, shut the great valve again, and deliberately smashed the mechanism with a wrench, wedging it so that the valve couldn't be opened. Then he did the same to the control which governed the flow of water.

He whirled, picked up the radio cabinet and said: "Let's go!"

CHAPTER XIII

DEATH'S GAMBIT

CAPTAIN HAZZARD snatched the tiny bomb from Beckhardt. He took another one from his belt. He made the whole party retire to the far side of the chamber.

He ran forward, placed a bomb close to the door, touched the striker. Then he joined the others against the far wall. A ripping, roaring explosion came which momentarily rose above the rumbling of the mountain. The door was torn from its hinges and crashed outward, killing two Python Men, wounding others.

It almost struck the Phoenix. The vulture man fled away. The Indians followed him. At a nod from Captain Hazzard, the people for whose lives he was responsible followed him out.

Gun flame lanced down the corridor. Bullets screamed by their

heads The Phoenix was shooting, wildly, furiously. Hazzard grabbed his Colt from Mary Parker and fired till the Phoenix took cover.

Then they ran along the passage toward a far-off glow that was the light of day. Hazzard was alert for trouble. He knew the Indians would gather somewhere, make a stand.

He saw them grouped together at the mouth of the exit. Spears came his way. Shrieking, furious savages ran to head off the escape of these men who had a short time ago been abject slaves.

Hazzard touched the striker of another of his small grenades and hurled it. It was life against life now. The mountain was trembling, roaring. They must leave it soon or be swept into oblivion.

The bomb struck the foremost Indians, and they seemed to disintegrate. They died instantly and the others fell back shrieking. This seemed to be more evidence of the might and wrath of Omoxotl.

They retreated, leaving the passage clear, and they didn't try to molest Hazzard and his party further. But there was another barrier that Hazzard feared far more. Indians he could fight, with guns, with bombs, with his bare hands even. But that other barrier, dim, intangible, awful would be flung across the trail, barring their way.

Earthquakes were shaking the sides of the mountain. As they passed down the trail great rocks fell near them. They had to keep a constant look-out to be ready to dodge. Staring up, Hazzard saw a cliff break away and tumble with a roar like a hundred Niagaras. The earth under them trembled. There was terror in the air—terror, horror, madness. The awful shadow of the Phoenix seemed to hover over them still.

And then they came to a bend in the trail, and Hazzard saw the thing he dreaded. The curtain of weird luminescence hung between the two walls of the gorge. It danced, quiv-

ered, touched, retreated. Even the earthquake tremors which shook the mountain didn't affect it. It seemed worse now, more sinister, more symbolic of the evil of the Phoenix.

MARY PARKER clutched her father. Some of the slaves, miners and halfbreed Indians, whose nerves had been shattered by their awful experience, gasped in fear and crowded together. But they saw Captain Hazzard walk steadily on and they followed.

He was close to the death curtain now. Then, looking through it, he saw a line of green-plumed Python Men drawn up. The Indians set up savage exultant cries as they saw Hazzard's party.

Captain Hazzard set the X-ray cabinet down, switched it on. He made the others stand back while he advanced, holding the Roentgen-ray tube before him, letting its rays strike out toward the light curtain.

He walked closer and closer and nothing happened. The waving, shimmering mantle of dread light still hung there. The Indians' cries increased. Hazzard went closer, closer, till his head began to ring, till that strange dizziness came which was the first warning of a bloodstream being affected. He went closer still, till he could hardly stand. He pushed the power switch of the X-ray machine farther over.

Wash called a warning to him. Hazzard was reeling now, swaying on his feet. Anger, disappointment, despair beat in his brain. They were hemmed in by death. Death behind them in the form of the mighty mountain. Death in front in that ghastly curtain that seemed to have baffled him.

"Look out, Captain. Don't go any closer! Here, let me hold it."

Wash came forward. Jake and Martin followed. If Captain Hazzard was going to walk into that curtain of death these loyal friends and assistants wanted to follow him. A

lump rose in Hazzard's throat. A haze swam before his eyes. Yes, if he gave the order, they would follow him. They would stay at his side, marching like soldiers in the face of withering fire, marching straight into that shimmering light curtain.

Wash was stumbling. Jake's jaws had stopped working. He was pushing forward slowly like a man walking against a hurricane sweeping over a desert. The light was making him dizzy. But they had faith—faith in Captain Hazzard. He had contrived this thing to battle the light waves. He had said it would work. If he said it, it must be so.

Then suddenly the miracle happened. Hazzard trembled, stared. The X-ray cabinet almost slipped from his hands. Then he held it tighter. Ahead of him, straight ahead, where the alpha rays from the mechanism he was holding bisected those other rays, the curtain of death was thinning. The hideous aura didn't quite touch now. When the shimmering points of light approached there was a weakness, an indecision about them.

Hazzard moved further into them, fiercely, exultantly. Jake and Wash and Martin followed. Into the curtain of death, into it like four comrades of a lost legion storming their way through terror.

And now the light was melting rapidly, cleaving away, leaving a tunnel for them to pass through. Hazzard called to the others. "Get the girl, Jake. Get her father. Have them all come. Hurry!"

Jake ran back, rounded up Mary Parker and her father; got the dazed men who had been his fellow slaves into motion. Gasping, trembling, they stumbled into the curtain, in through the tunnel that Captain Hazzard had made. On they stumbled, on to where the Tzutuhiles stood facing them.

Then another miracle happened—a miracle that followed logically on the heels of this first. Hazzard was ahead, walking resolutely toward them. And suddenly one of the Py-

thon Men went down on his knees. He bent his green-plumed head to the dust. He said: "Zuma! Zuma! Master! Master!"

The other Indians followed suit. They had seen with their own eyes what the Phoenix had told them could never happen. They had seen men, living men, walk through that curtain of spectral light and still stay alive. They knew now that this tall white man was a god greater than the shriveled vulturelike being who had ruled them from the mountain.

They fell back peacefully and let Hazzard's party pass. And Hazzard spoke a warning then: "Run! Run for your lives! *Huetenzo!* I have set my curse on Omoxotl."

The Indians shot terrified glances at the volcano. Then they turned and fled toward the jungle. Hazzard's party followed. The ground was shaking. A steady roar of rocks sounded all around them as tremors shook down the boulders. Another piece of a cliff broke away and almost blocked the trail. They climbed over it, pushed on.

They reached the last downward slant of the trail before it entered the green wall of the jungle. A sound that was greater than any explosion broke out behind them. A sound that was the living, furious symbol of all tumult lifted its gigantic voice above the mountain. The earth shook. The sky grew dark. Flame speared up from the top of the crater, flame and gas, bearing aloft with it tons of structural steel and concrete, tons of riveted steel plate.

The mountain had spat out the great valve as a monster might spit some unsavory thing from its throat. But, though the valve was gone now, the mountain wasn't done with its violence. Those tons of water had built up a pressure in the bowels of the earth that spelled a cataclysm. Lava, hot and livid, was pushing up to the top of the crater. Millions of pounds of pressure was behind it.

Hazzard let his party into the jungle. They reached it just as the first small stones the volcano had disgorged commenced hurtling down. They made their way through a green world of roaring sound and somber shadows. Monkeys fled through the trees chattering in panic. Parrots screamed past. Jaguars slunk ahead of them along the trail, for once forgetting their terror and hatred of human beings in the greater fear of the volcano. Omoxotl was on the rampage. Terror's Shadow was living up to its name.

They were five miles away when the biggest explosion of all came—a gigantic upheaval that blew off the whole top of Omoxotl.

After it had subsided, when the fires began flickering out and a slow, somber brooding peace descended on the jungle, Mary Parker said with a tinge of regret:

"Now we shall never know who the Phoenix was."

Captain Hazzard heard her, turned, and asked a question: "How well did you know your father's partner, Kurt Gordon?"

"Not very well. I've only seen him once or twice and that was a good while ago. Why?"

"Ask your father when he gets better and can speak. He will uphold me, I think, when I tell you that the Phoenix was Kurt Gordon."

"Gordon—the Phoenix?"

"Yes. Those gases changed him,

shriveled his body; made him look so horrible that even his own family wouldn't recognize him. It's barely possible that even your father didn't know who he was. But it was Gordon. I came across some papers in his safe which proved it. He'd been in Central America for years.

"He must have been studying Omoxotl, dreaming secret dreams of power. He probably used money that belonged to your father's partnership with him to lay the foundation of his project. But he had to have more money than that. He got it cleverly. It necessitated a tie-up with a New York gang, however."

"Why?"

"Jewels," said Captain Hazzard. "That's what the slaves were doing. Gordon used the heat of the volcano to make synthetic gems that couldn't be told from nature's products, sapphires, emeralds, diamonds. That's why these Indians were so free with their emeralds. That's one reason they were so loyal to the Phoenix. And his New York gang was his outlet. The jewels were smuggled into the U. S., sold at a big profit, and the millions that Gordon got for them financed his mad ambitions for world dominion."

Hazzard looked back. The crater of Omoxotl—the lost city—was still smoking. It was a giant sinister torch lifting up into the dome of the sky. It was the funeral pyre of the Phoenix.

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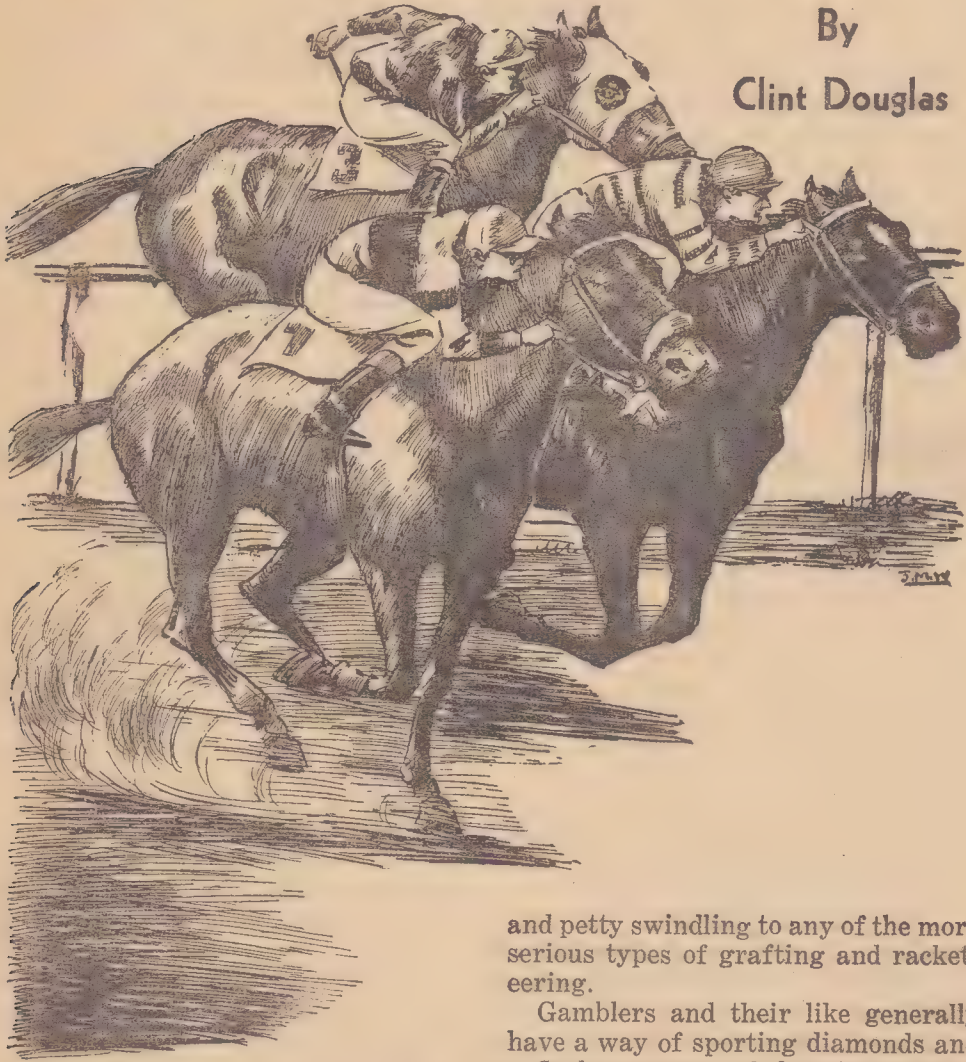


PROBAK JUNIOR

A gentleman crook spreads the bait for a

Boomerang Bluff

By
Clint Douglas



AL SANSONE had been in Cincinnati for several days on business when he decided to drop over to Latonia and take in the races. His business in the Ohio city was not definite in nature. He just idled around trying to pick up money in any way he could from gambling

and petty swindling to any of the more serious types of grafting and racketeering.

Gamblers and their like generally have a way of sporting diamonds and a flashy manner of dressing that at once sets them apart, but not so with Sansone. He was as sedate and refined looking as a judge or a senator. In fact, he did look like Colonel Hadley, the senior senator from Kentucky who is popularly known because of his possession of one of the finest racing stables in the blue grass state. More

than once Sansone had gotten a laugh by posing as Hadley; for although he had never seen him, he was well aware of the resemblance. His impersonation was all the more realistic because Colonel Hadley himself was somewhat of a "kidder" and a joshier. Sansone was a long time in getting over how he, a low down, deceitful crook, could ever be mistaken for the pious and honorable senior senator.

Sansone was having one of his unlucky days at the track and along about the fifth race he was ready to call it a day. He wandered over toward the paddock, and finding nothing there that interested him he walked slowly back toward the rail. He enjoyed just mingling with the crowd and studying their faces as they watched their favorites going on to victory or down in defeat. One man interested him in particular. He was evidently a bad loser, for he was moaning and bewailing the fact that Miss Nakamura had not even showed in the last race.

"What are you whining about?" snapped Sansone in an assumed tone of righteous indignation. "Probably lost two dollars on a race and you're crying. How about me? My name's Hadley and that horse happens to be mine, but you don't see me belly-achin'."

The man first started in surprise when the gambler spoke to him, but then he quickly cringed meekly as he heard himself being upbraided.

"Oh, Colonel Hadley," he began weakly, and then he went on timidly to defend the fact that he was complaining.

Before the man had finished talking Sansone's lips parted, not in reverence, but in surprise. The man had just lost \$500 on the last race.

"I think I can help you," said Sansone quietly.

"Please don't ask me my name," the man whimpered. "Because I'd only have to tell you a lie."

Sansone studied him coolly. He could scent the reason for his wanting

to be unknown. Gradually with clever strategy he drew the whole story from him. It was as old as it was pitiable.

He was a teller in a branch bank across the river. Over a period of months he had been taking from the bank's funds and covering his shortages by tricky manipulations. He was not a gambler—he did not squander the money. He took only small sums to pay doctor bills, and to support a widowed sister. Now the shortage amounted to close to \$2000 and the audit was to be made on Monday.

In desperation he had taken an additional \$2000 and come to the track to try to double it. He had never been to a track before, or bet on a horse, but he tried his best. He studied the selections in the newspaper and placed his money on the horses that were picked by the consensus. He had lost \$1000, and had an equal sum left to bet. Would Colonel Hadley be so good as to offer him a tip on a horse?

Al Sansone did some fast thinking.

"I wouldn't advise betting on any horse," he said seriously. "I've been following the game for a long time. I'm ready to give it up myself because I hate it. And so I'll tell you what I'll do. Because I like you. Your face reminds me of my dear, dead brother, God rest his soul, and so for his sake I'll help you out. I paid \$10,000 for that horse called Miss Nakamura. Not because I wanted to buy her, but because a man I hate was crazy to get her, and so I outbid him just so he wouldn't get the satisfaction of getting her."

Sansone continued, "That man is Schuyler Beekman." The name was fictitious but the meek bank clerk was completely gullible. "Beekman is so wild to get that horse that he now has offered me \$15,000. But badly as I need cash I wouldn't sell her to him if he gave me \$100,000 because it would show that I finally had to give in to him. I couldn't stand his gloating.

"So this is my plan. You give me a nominal sum for the horse, and then you can easily get \$10,000 for her

from Beekman any day in the week. That will give you a comfortable margin with which to cover your shortage. And I'll at least have the satisfaction of knowing I've helped you, my good friend."

"What is the nominal sum?" asked the man fearfully.

"Five thousand dollars."

"But I have only one thousand," wailed the man. "Where could I get the other four thousand?"

"Get it at the bank."

The man's eyes shifted about uneasily. "Oh, I couldn't," he murmured in a quaking voice. "Besides the bank is closed now and when it opens Monday morning it'll be too late."

Sansone was uneasy, too. "How much is the most you can dig up?"

The clerk was thoughtful for a minute. "My wife has been saving money in a coffee pot for years. She must have about four hundred dollars. And maybe I could borrow a little from Joe. He's my brother-in-law. But fifteen hundred dollars, Colonel Hadley, is about all I could get."

"O.K., get the fifteen hundred and meet me in the Carew Arcade at nine o'clock tomorrow morning. We'll fix everything up."

The man hesitated a little. "Are you sure everything will be all right and Mr. Beekman will want to buy the horse for ten thousand dollars?"

"Oh, that's a sure thing," assured the gambler with confidence. "There's absolutely no doubt about that at all."

The man thanked him profusely and promised to meet him on time.

AL SANSONE was at the designated meeting place long before the appointed time. He did not want to risk any chance that he would miss his "friend." But nine o'clock came and went, and still there was no sign of him. Sansone frankly was worried. About five minutes to ten the man finally walked in. He was a sorry, bedraggled sight.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Colonel Hadley," he began with a quavering voice, "it's

just that I couldn't raise the money, that's all!" he finally blurted out.

Sansone was terrified, "But you've got the thousand?"

"Yes, I've got that. And I've got four hundred and twelve dollars and nineteen cents from my wife's coffee pot. I didn't tell her. And I borrowed fifty dollars from my brother-in-law. And I got ten dollars that I had deposited with the gas and electric company, that didn't need to be there."

That was different. Sansone said:

"I had a friend of mine call up Mr. Beekman last night, and Beekman told him he would gladly pay ten thousand dollars for the horse. So everything is fixed for you to go over to his house and make the deal. Now if you wait here a minute I want to go in this drugstore down at the end of the arcade here, and make a phone call, and then I'll come back and we'll drive over to Beekman's house together. But, of course, I won't go in his house, you understand. Now you just wait here till I get back."

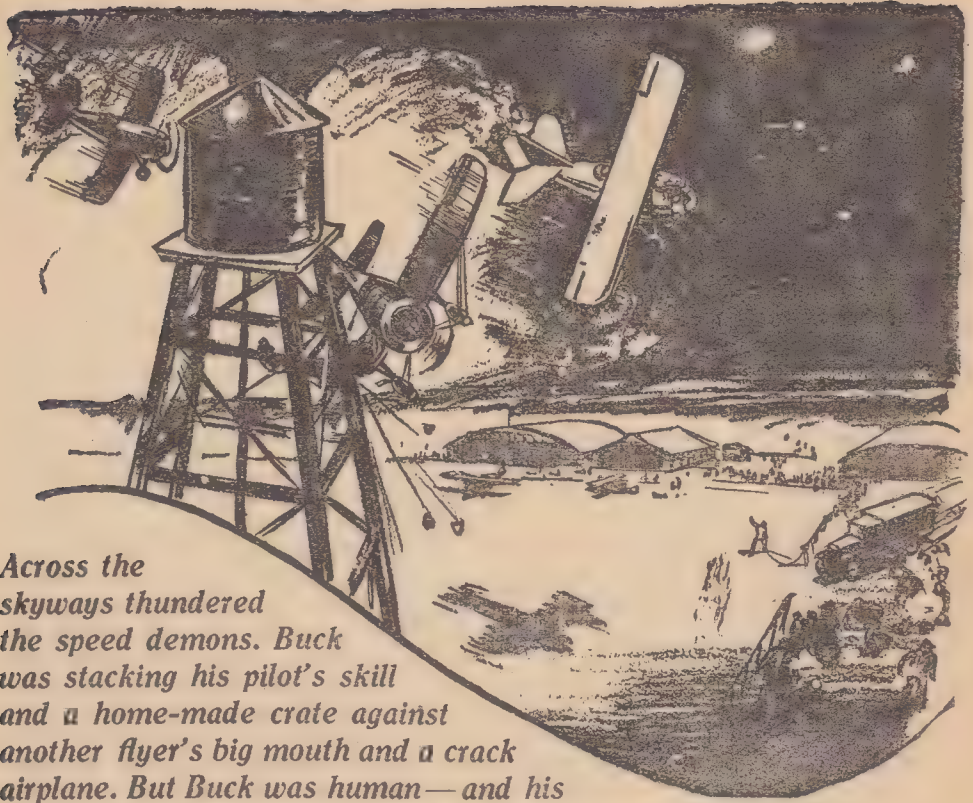
Sansone walked quickly toward the far end of the arcade. The place had been deserted, and no one had seen him. It was just too easy.

As Sansone was about to leave a crowd of men entered the building and engulfed him. They all seemed to be looking at him. Sansone could not make it out. He saw a flash of guns and he felt the cold hard feel of cuffs on his wrists.

Some one said, "I always knew you were a kidder, Colonel Hadley, but I never thought you could pull a bluff like this."

Sansone wheeled about. No one else knew him by the name Colonel Hadley. But apparently they were not talking to him. They were speaking to his "friend." And the man was answering them, and talking to them.

What he said was: "I don't think he would have tried to fool me if I hadn't been wearing my old stable clothes." Then he smiled. "But he does bear a striking resemblance to me, doesn't he?"



Across the skyways thundered the speed demons. Buck was stacking his pilot's skill and a home-made crate against another flyer's big mouth and a crack airplane. But Buck was human—and his wings were clipped by the code of the sky.

Sky-High Outcast

By Cliff Howe

VICIOUSLY Buck Rankin pulled his belt to the last notch. It was a frantic attempt to take up on a slack stomach that hadn't seen food for the last three meal times.

Buck knew he was starved, broke and in the depths of despair. But he could not know of the important part that same belt was to play in a fierce race—a race with death that Buck Rankin would make before the sun had gone down behind a far-off mountain range.

It was the morning of the cross-country air races to Santa Monica. Buck stood on the tarmac of the Mid-Western Air Terminal and stared dejectedly at the line of warming race planes, looking especially at the two Kendall low-winged racers there near the center.

Buck stood like a man alone in a strange land, and felt like one. Except for possibly one person with whom he had tried to get in touch on his arrival, he probably didn't know a

single human for five hundred miles about the airport well enough to borrow a nickel.

He started violently at a chuckling voice behind him. "What's gone haywire, Buck?" some one was saying. "Havin' a fit?"

He whirled. Then, abruptly, his expression changed and his face took on a look of joyful recognition.

"Chuck Page! Gee, but I'm glad to see you, guy! Never wanted to see a friend so much in my life. I knew you were out here somewhere, and I tried to get hold of you when I got in town, but I couldn't locate you."

Chuck grinned. "Yeah, you wouldn't find me, probably. I moved to a cheaper place about a week ago. But for the love of Mike, when did you get in—how—and what for?"

Buck grinned easily now. "Got in about an hour ago. Broke, so I walked halfway to the field and caught a ride. I came out to fly one of those Kendall jobs in the race."

"But I heard only a few minutes ago that this new pilot from the coast—Tex Glover—is flying one of Kendall's jobs, and Kendall's flying the other. How come?"

Buck's grin faded. "That's what I was having the fit about all by myself when you came up just now," he told his friend. He felt Chuck propelling him toward the lunch room across the road as he talked. "I wrote Kendall about flying his job for him. Heard he was entering two jobs in the Santa Monica race, and thought I might get a chance with one of them. He wrote back and said he wouldn't make any promises until he'd seen me handle his job, but if I cared to come out on my own hook, he'd see what he could do."

"Well, what's gone haywire? Pop Kendall can't have anything against your flying, Buck. There isn't a better cross-country racing pilot in the country than you. You just haven't been getting the breaks. Take that last race, when you cracked up at Roosevelt Field. If you'd had

a halfway-decent plane, instead of the orange crate that fly-by-night outfit wished on you, you'd have trimmed the field."

Buck nodded glumly. "Yeah, maybe. But I think that's one thing that queered me here. Kendall hinted at it when I talked to him a few minutes ago. Now I'm out here and he says he understood I had a lot more experience than he's since heard on good authority that I have. Won't even let me fly his job to show him I can handle it."

Chuck pushed him into a chair at a corner table of the lunch room, and sat down across from him.

"So Kendall heard all this stuff, did he—on good authority?"

Buck nodded.

Others entered the room. Buck watched the two newcomers with a quizzical expression. One was Kendall, but the big aircraft manufacturer and pilot didn't interest him now nearly as much as did another man beside him. This was a short, squat figure, dressed in a dapper outfit, who seemed to talk almost continuously to Kendall. And, strangely enough, the great airman listened to him intently.

CHUCK half-turned in his chair and shot a glance backward, and motioned behind him with his thumb.

"That's Tex Glover, the guy who's flying the other job."

"Yeah," quietly from Buck. "Quite a talker."

Chuck nodded. "And I got a good hunch that guy talks a wonderful flight." His voice lowered. "He's got Kendall buffaloed with that letter he brought with him from an old friend of Kendall's up in Washington. Heard he came with a recommendation that's a knockout, and that's why Kendall falls for him so hot."

Buck shot him a questioning glance and Chuck understood.

"Oh, sure. The guy can fly, if you call flying getting off the ground and landing again. He's good enough to get by with his line and that letter

of recommendation to back him up."

"How long's he been here?"

"Last night, I understand."

"Funny thing," Buck confided. "You say he came from the Pacific Coast somewhere?"

"Yeah. Around Seattle, I think. Says he's an old war-time ace."

Buck continued to study Tex Glover across the room as he sat by Kendall at another table.

"I've seen that guy Glover somewhere," he said at length. "Wonder if he was ever in the East, around New York."

Chuck grinned. "Listen, fella, I'll tell you something, but first you've got to promise me something. What I'm going to tell you is going to make you mighty sore. Hold your temper. It won't do you any good to go busting this guy Glover—not yet. Personally, I don't like the guy."

"Okay," agreed Buck. "Shoot."

"I think you're right about this guy Glover. Seeing him before, I mean," Chuck confided. "Because I overheard him telling Kendall he'd seen you pull some boners at Roosevelt. They were alone in the office, and I heard it over the transom. He went on to say that you were barred from racing in the East because you were too reckless."

"Huh?" Buck's muscles tightened into hard knots. His face grew crimson as he rose slowly with a menacing gleam in his keen eyes.

"Hey, wait," pleaded Chuck. "You promised you'd wait."

He pushed Buck back into his chair. Buck's teeth clenched angrily, as a look of hate shot from his eyes at the dapper little figure who sat talking to Kendall.

"Listen," Chuck was begging. "I've got more to tell you. I can't afford to take a chance on Kendall's getting sore at me. He'd know that I overheard their conversation and told you, if you took a sock at Glover. And I can't afford that—not right now."

Buck remained staring.

"I've been working on a ship — a

fast, streamlined racer," Chuck went on. "I'm trying to get Kendall to buy the design from me. She's done, and I had hoped to enter her in the race, but she's got me scared. Something about her that doesn't act right. I'm working on her now, and as soon as the race is over I'll get hold of Kendall and—"

Buck had hardly heard his words. He glared fiercely at Tex Glover across the room, and his lips tightened in a hard straight line.

"I'd give anything in the world to know where I've seen that guy," he snarled, half to himself. "And I'd give my right leg to beat both him and Kendall in this race."

Suddenly Buck sat up with a start. Something of Chuck's last words had clicked in his brain, and his hand clutched Chuck's arm excitedly.

"Hey, this plane of yours! Tell me what you said about it again. I missed it."

"What's the matter — you gone nuts?" Chuck asked him.

"No, but I've got an idea. Tell me about this job of yours. You said you were afraid of it."

Chuck repeated his words about the fast, light racer he had worked on. Yes, he was afraid of it. It acted queerly.

Buck's face flamed with eager excitement as he listened.

"Look, Chuck. No kidding. We're entering this new box kite of yours in the race right now, this morning."

Chuck shook his head sadly. "No, Buck. You're all wet. I wouldn't ask you to fly something I was afraid of. I've got to figure out what's wrong with her, and then I'll fix it. Besides, I only hoped to enter in the race to make a showing. She's got an old Hisso motor in her, because I couldn't afford to buy a modern one. She wouldn't stand a chance in this race against ships with Wasps like those new Kendalls. Hasn't got it in her. And last, but not least, Buck, friends don't grow on bushes, kid. I wouldn't lose you for the world."

Buck shrugged lightly at the last words. Then a slow grin of anticipation spread over his face.

"Yeah, but think of your side of it. Twenty-five thousand dollars is the first prize for this race. That much dough doesn't grow on bushes, either. I'd give my right leg to trim this guy Glover in this race. A cross-country air race is more of a test of the pilot and the motor than it is of speed, sometimes. And I've got a good hunch that guy Glover hasn't got the goods."

Buck pushed back his chair with finality, in spite of Chuck's objections. "You finance the trip, and I'll fly her," he said. "If I win any money, it's yours, Chuck. Come on, let's have a look at her, anyway."

Still objecting, Chuck led the way to the hangar where the new home-made racing plane was stored. Buck inspected it minutely, admiring the streamline effect of the construction. Suddenly he bent down and picked up the tail.

"Come on, big boy," he chuckled. "We've only got about an hour before the race starts. Let's get her warmed up and see how she acts."

FOR fifteen minutes they labored with the old Hisso, struggling to get an explosion from the cylinders. They whirled the prop until they were nearly exhausted.

Buck was at the prop again. They'd been taking turns. A crowd had gathered—laughing, kidding pilots who poked fun at the crudely constructed plane with the old engine. Buck swung with all his might.

A thrill coursed through him. She caught, kicked back, turned the other way and began to run smoothly.

He called to Chuck in the cockpit above the roar of the warming motor. "There won't be time for a test hop, Chuck. I'm going down to enter her in the race before it's too late. Get her warm."

Chuck tried to stop him, but Buck was racing down the tarmac toward

the judges' office. He came running in breathlessly.

"Another plane entering the race," he barked. "Chuck Page is entering his job, the Page special. I'm flying her for him. My name's Buck Rankin."

He saw the look of surprise on the judge's face turn to disbelief.

"You mean you're going to fly that mouse-trap, with that old lunker of a motor?"

"Never mind what she's got," Buck snapped back at him. "She's going to Santa Monica, or as near to there as she'll fly me. Get it down in your book. I'm ready to shove off when you say so."

He heard the roar of laughter from the office as he dived from the room and ran down the tarmac. Other pilots chuckled as he passed and said things about a guy who wanted to commit suicide. Buck trotted closer to the two Kendalls and shot a venomous glance at Tex Glover as he was climbing into his cockpit. There was a sneering look on Glover's face. The news had spread rapidly about the new entry.

Chuck was still objecting, but Buck would not be pushed aside.

"I'm not asking much," he insisted. "About twenty bucks for me and the gas and oil on the trip and a full tank of gas here. Hurry and call the gas wagon over. We'll be taking off in ten minutes."

Chuck climbed from the cockpit and Buck took his place. He checked the instruments anxiously, watched the oil temperature and pressure gauges, saw the old Hisso humming smoothly now and wondered what had kept them from starting it easily. He wondered about a lot of things ahead of him on the race as he went over the course between the Mid-Western Airport and Santa Monica.

Gas was poured into the tank. The motor idled easily now. Chuck poked his hand over the edge of the cockpit. There was frantic hope in his eyes and sincerity in his voice.

"For the love of Mike, be careful, Buck! Don't take any chances with yourself, I mean. I wish I had a 'chute for you, but there isn't a spare one in the place."

Buck grinned back at him. "I flew six years before they even invented 'chutes, fella," he told him. "And don't forget, you may win a bunch of dough out of this race. Don't worry about me. We make one stop at Albuquerque for lunch. I'll gas up there and see if I can tune this steam engine a little, while we wait for the start."

"Good luck to you, Buck, and—be careful."

Buck grinned back at him. "Don't worry. And I'll win for you, if it's possible in this crate, Chuck. I'm out to trim that guy Tex Glover if it's the last thing I do, fella."

BUCK saw the starter's flag flash before Tex Glover's plane. Kendall was already in the air with his racer. Others had gone, and more would follow. Buck's muscles tightened into hard, determined knots as he saw Tex Glover take the air and roar out to the west.

Buck sat hunched over his stick, waiting for his signal. He was last to enter, last to go. He got the flash, battered the gun open. Pushed the stick forward and felt the scream of the wind as the home-made racer shot over the ground.

She took the air like a rocket, hurled through space at a thrilling clip and snarled at the tails of the last ships to leave. Buck thrilled at the feel of the air again, hanging low in his seat as the ship howled on to the west.

He caught up with the plane which had taken off before him and laughed in the pilot's face as he passed without effort. That was one of the birds who had laughed when he announced that he was entering in the race with Chuck's home-made job.

The speed of the little ship appalled him. It hurled through space like a comet. In his long experience flying

race planes, he'd never flown anything as fast as this job that Chuck had built—certainly nothing with the small amount of power the Hisso in his lap possessed.

He wondered what Chuck had meant about being scared of her. He'd said something about a left turn. An hour passed, then two. Five planes had seemed to slow before him since the start, then had faded in the distance as Buck crept up on them, leaving them behind. He was in the clear now. Kendall's two planes were out there somewhere ahead. He wondered how far.

His teeth clenched as he hurled on. Texas landscape drifted beneath him now. Two more hours and he'd be coming down at Albuquerque for a rest and a lunch.

He dropped his nose so that he was almost flat on the ground, roaring close to the level fields and open country to get the most speed possible.

The thought of Chuck's words throbbed in his brain. He wished he dared take the time to test the maneuverability of the ship and see just what was wrong. But he must keep going. No telling about this Hisso. They were good in their day, and this one had seen plenty of days in the air. His eyes stared ahead hopefully for a moment. Then he sat up in his cockpit with a jerk.

His keen eyes had caught something there in the distance—two tiny specks that raced along even with each other. He could see them clearly in the bright air now. The two Kendall racers!

His pulse began beating wildly. He'd hoped to win by a chance—a chance that fogs and storms and the many other things that rose in these cross-country air races would give him to show superior piloting. But never in his wildest dreams had he hoped that he could actually catch up with those Kendalls, unless something of this sort did happen. But no fog, no storm had arisen to stop them, and still he had caught them—or would

catch them if nothing happened to stop the headlong lunge of Chuck's home-made comet.

Every nerve in his body was alert, tingling with the thrill that he felt as he hurled on. Before him, the specks became full-sized airplanes — low-winged devils that seemed to struggle for a burst of speed, as the home-made crate stormed up at them.

He saw one of the pilots, the smaller one, turn in his cockpit and stare blankly at the demon that seemed about to pass. He saw, too, the white mask of fear rise in that face.

And Kendall himself, sitting higher in the cockpit, turned and stared backward for a second, then whirled and ducked low in his cockpit to cut down all possible wind resistance.

BUCK'S face was wrinkled in a delighted grin of triumph as he thundered up even. He turned as he passed and looked each pilot full in the face.

Then, like a flash, the grin faded from his face. Something had gone wrong! The Hisso before him had suddenly sputtered. It caught again. Buck sat rigid, hardly daring to breathe, and waited in terrible suspense for what might come.

Sput-sput! Again he heard the sound. It sent a chill of fearful apprehension down his spine. He had been winning hands down, and now it looked as if he were doomed to defeat, after all.

Again the Hisso sputtered, this time for a longer period. It picked up quickly and as quickly gasped again, like a dying man choking for air.

Instinctively Buck searched the earth below. He was almost flat on the ground. He climbed slightly for more time. The Hisso was going dead. The ground below was level, and seemed smooth. Lucky, that. The Hisso gasped for the last time, choked up and died with the prop straight across.

Buck picked a spot. As suddenly as an expert might lay a rug, Buck

brought the racer down to the ground. His heart sank like a rock as he heard the thunder of the two Kendalls die in the distance.

He had an idea what had caused the trouble. It was simple, if that was it, but time was precious. He wanted to keep even and ahead of those Kendalls, even though they'd started six minutes before he had. So Tex Glover said he was too reckless! They'd stopped him racing in the East because of that, had they? He didn't have much experience as a pilot, eh?

With flashing movements, his hands worked with the gas line. It sounded like water in gas. He heard the roar of a motor overhead, and saw a plane flash past, with the pilot waving over the edge of his cockpit.

The sight and the realization that he had lost valuable time drove him to work even more swiftly. He had the line disconnected. Gas and gluck and rusty water spewed out on the ground.

Two more ships roared by just above and snarled into the west. Frantically Buck worked with the carburetor drains, then put things back in place again. Two more planes roared over, one close behind the other. Now he was last in the race again.

His heart fell with a thud. Poor old Chuck! The poor guy had put about everything he had into this crate. Even his gas tank was some old empty he'd been able to pick up for a song. It was hard to get those things completely cleaned out when they lay about for a long time.

He had the parts together now, and replaced the cowling with trembling fingers. He raced to the cockpit—then to the prop. With all his might he spun the big wood propeller. Again he dived to the cockpit and flipped on the switch. Back to the prop now. Again it spun—silently, with a sickening, sucking sound that was far from the explosion noise that he craved so eagerly.

Minutes seemed to flash past with even greater speed than had the other ships in the race as they roared overhead. Buck was working like a madman, talking to himself. He felt ready to drop. Back and forth, from cockpit to prop, and back again.

And as he worked, precious minutes swept past—minutes he could not hope to make up now before he reached Albuquerque, minutes that drew his desperate hope of beating Tex Glover further and further away and hurled into the discard the opportunity of winning the prize of twenty-five thousand dollars for his friend Chuck.

Viciously he whirled at the prop. If it didn't catch this time, he'd have to give up for a while and rest. He was about done in.

All his strength went into that last pull. The great wooden club spun with a hissing sound; then with a wheeze, a cough and a sputter, it turned. It turned once more as a cylinder caught, and ran stubbornly at first and then smoothly.

BUCK'S rubbery legs carried him to the cockpit and lifted him over the cowl. He managed to batter the gun open, felt the ship gather motion under him and eased back on the stick as the speed increased.

Again he was in the air. Hungrily he hunched low in the cockpit, watching the compass. Gradually his strength came back. But he was still last in the race. The fastest plane in the race, and he was coming in last on the only stop scheduled.

Another hour of harrowing suspense passed. He couldn't see a single ship ahead of him. Even now, before he reached Albuquerque, he could see the sneering grin Tex Glover would have waiting for him when he landed. But perhaps it wasn't any more than fair for Glover to have his day. Buck had had his moment when he'd passed Kendall and Glover earlier.

He saw the town of Albuquerque before him now. There was the field.

He lunged down at it, saw a flagman waiting for him, flashing the flag as he thundered over. The time-keeper would be there, too, checking him in last at Albuquerque.

For the moment he forgot Chuck's words about his fear of the ship and disregarded his warning, in his eagerness to get on the ground and have a look at the engine and the mag.

Buck pulled up in a chandelle to the left, turned to make a return over the field and held his turn for a moment. Suddenly a chill went down his spine. He was trying to straighten out of the turn. Something was haywire. He couldn't seem to get out of that left bank.

He remembered Chuck's words now, and kicked viciously at the rudder, holding the stick over to the right with all his might. He felt it give a little, felt the bank lessen.

He was too close to the ground now to try much. Still, he was desperate. It was his only hope. He kicked opposite rudder with all the strength he had, then gunned the engine wide to take effect on the tiny rudder, and yanked over on the stick again.

His heart leaped wildly as he felt the plane come level, sluggishly. She was giving him an argument all the way, but she was coming! Trees flashed at him just below. But he was in time. He stormed back at the airport and brought the ship down with plenty of speed. He landed with hardly a jar and breathed his first long, easy intake of air for the past few minutes.

He saw Kendall and Tex Glover coming toward him and heard Glover cackle as he spoke.

"You started last, Rankin, and you came in away behind that."

Buck's muscles tensed. He heard Kendall speaking in kinder tones.

"That was tough luck, your motor cutting out on you back there," he said. "You have a mighty fast plane." He was looking over Chuck's home-made racer shrewdly. "Tell me—what caused that trouble you had just

now in that left turn? I noticed that you just made it. Something faulty with the ship, I suppose?"

Buck shook his head vigorously. "Oh, the ship's perfect. I was just giving the crowd a thrill, Kendall. That was all." He left them then, and walked to the judges' office.

"I'm late, I know," he opened. "Had motor trouble and had to set down. How late am I—I mean behind the winner of this first lap?"

The judge went over his records. "About forty minutes, I should say," he replied. "The two Kendall jobs are leading the race so far. Of course the next lap will tell. Some storm trouble over toward California. We're waiting to hear now. Probably have some dope on it by the time you're ready to take off."

Buck nodded, smiling a little to himself as he walked back to his plane. He worked on the mag, cleaned the points and adjusted them, then smiled again as he saw the condition of the magneto. After all, Chuck Page was a mighty fine designer.

He finished working on the engine, and whirled the prop just for fun. She caught the first time. That was better. If he'd only taken the time to clean and adjust everything back at his forced landing field!

A mechanic from the office stepped up to him and handed him a telegram. He tore it open anxiously. Read it and grinned. Read it again.

"Think I know what's wrong with left turns. Too small rudder and ailerons. Might help if you increase warp on left wing. Best of luck.

CHUCK."

Buck Rankin grinned to himself, and walked back to the ship. He worked with the wires and cables, making the suggested adjustments. They looked better to him now. Later, larger ailerons and rudder should solve the trouble.

SHIRPS were warming for the start of the next and last lap of the race—the most perilous part of the

trip. Mountains, bad country, and the judge had hinted at a storm. Buck grinned to himself as he whirled his prop and heard the Hiss catch once more.

He saw the smug look of confidence on Tex Glover's face as he walked past on his way to his Kendall plane. Now was the test. He'd beat Glover, if it was the last thing he did.

Ships roared into the air at one-minute intervals, at the signals of the starter's flag. Buck taxied down the field and waited his turn, tense and eager to be off—to go hurtling toward the backs of those others, to thrill as he passed Kendall and Glover again. There wasn't much chance of his having trouble with his engine now. Everything looked okay.

Glover and then Kendall roared down the field, lifted and droned west toward the finishing point. Buck watched them go.

Suddenly a running figure, coming across the field, attracted his attention. He was waving his arms frantically, shouting something to the starter with his flag, and waving the planes back to the ground. He and the starter broke into a run down to the line of waiting planes. Four of them, including Buck's racer, still remained on the ground.

"A storm! A terrible storm over in the mountains, along the Colorado River between Arizona and California!" the man shouted in Buck's helmeted ear. "We just got news of it. Looks bad. Moving east. Not much hope of getting through."

Buck stiffened in his cockpit. "Does that mean I'm ordered to stay on the ground?" he shot back.

The man shook his head. "You can go if you want to commit suicide. Wish we could have gotten word to the others."

Buck nodded shortly with a grim expression on his face. "I'll go," he snapped shortly. "Tell the starter to give the signal when he's ready."

Buck watched the other planes.

After all, it didn't matter much whether they went or not. He'd passed them all before.

The starter was waving his flag, motioning to him to start. The other three were backing out. Good judgment on their part.

Buck's hand battered the gun. He heard the sound of the Hisso, and roared west, leaving Albuquerque behind.

FOR the next two hours very little happened. Buck flew alone. A lot of time had elapsed between the last plane's leaving and his take-off. Gradually he crept up on the tail of the plane ahead of him.

As he passed, he made great, sweeping gestures with his arms, giving the storm signal. The pilot could see for himself now. Storm clouds were gathering to the west.

Buck lunged on. He looked back once and saw that the pilot had turned back. Wise boy. He almost wished he could turn back himself. There was nothing funny about one of these western storms.

He was climbing now, climbing for two dots that stood silhouetted against the blackness of the storm ahead. Those would be the two Kendalls. He could make them out, even at that distance, by their low wings. They were going through.

Even now, as he roared toward them, the wind was whipping about him, bouncing the little racer wildly about, like a fluff of down in a swirling breeze. Buck's fingers tightened his safety belt to keep him rigid in the cockpit. He knew storms—he'd been through many.

He saw the faces of the two pilots of the Kendalls as they turned and stared back at him now. They were working with their controls to keep their ships from looping completely. He wanted to grin at Glover as he passed close. There was no need to tell them there was a storm ahead now. They were in it—all three of them—fighting their individual bat-

ties with the elements.

Suddenly mist enveloped all three and hid each from the view of the others. Buck remembered that Glover was the closer to him. He veered to the left to make sure not to hit him in the smothering fog that enveloped them.

They shot out into the clear again, together now. There was no sign of Kendall. He might be anywhere. Buck turned and grinned at Glover for a moment, then stopped suddenly as he saw the expression on Glover's face. There was stark fear there, and pleading. Glover was motioning to him, and seemed to be trying to get him to slow up, so that he could keep up with him.

Buck hesitated for an instant. Perhaps it was a trick. He worked frantically with his controls to keep from being battered about by the terrible gusts of wind, and stared at Glover's face again as he flew closer. There was no doubt of the sincerity in those pleading eyes.

Buck's hand instinctively crept to the gun and pulled it back slightly. The two planes bucked and rolled wildly, close together. Buck wished that this guy Glover would fly at a more respectful distance. There was no sign of Kendall now and his plane—no sign of any other planes but those two.

They shot out into the open for an instant. Buck yanked hard on the stick. An ugly-looking mountain loomed before him. He saw Glover follow every movement in desperation. Wheels tore through tree tops, and he climbed frantically. Glover was coming with him, following his lead.

Mist enveloped him again. He lost Glover for a fraction of a second and found him again. Lightning crashed. The roar of thunder came to him, even above the drone of his own motor. They were being booted about in the storm like corks on a choppy sea.

Again the visibility cleared. He

could see below for a moment. The mountains had been passed, and level country lay before them. Then fog enveloped them once more. Glover hugged him close in those intervals of mist. He saw his face now, white as a ghost's. The kid was scared stiff. In spite of himself, Buck felt sorry for him. He seemed totally lost.

Anxiously Buck tried to check his course and lunge on. The compass could only be read vaguely. He glanced at Glover again. A gigantic gust of wind seemed to grip them and swirl them about. Buck gasped with horror for an instant. Glover was going—going down in a wild, spinning dive! He saw the frantic fear on the kid's face as he clutched the stick and held it back in his lap, his fright completely overpowering him.

Out in the clear they shot for that moment. Buck did not wait for more. He stuck the nose of his racer down and howled until the wires screamed with the tension and the ship groaned from the strain.

Desperately he tried to shout directions to the spinning Tex Glover as he held himself into the spin, frozen to the stick with horror. Down, down the two hurled, the one out of control, the other in a desperate dive.

BUCK saw Glover crash in a clump of trees at the edge of a large field, and pulled out just in time to escape annihilation himself. Then,

without the slightest hesitation, he came into the rough field to land. The country was open, but he couldn't see a house for miles. If Glover lived, then what? Buck hated him for what he'd done, but he couldn't leave him to die. After all, he was human—a fellow airman.

The wind was still wicked. Buck kicked his racer about angrily as he tried to set down in the field. It was a fight all the way. He felt the wheels touch. They rolled. Buck leaped from the cockpit and raced toward the woods, where the wreckage of the plane dangled close to the ground. Something awful and bloody hung half out of the cockpit. Glover—Tex Glover, the man he hated. But Buck pulled him out, listening to his heart. It was still pumping. He was cut and bruised and bleeding badly in half a dozen places.

Buck struggled with the problem as he carried Tex Glover to his plane and stared about for something with which to fasten him to the wing. The racer was single-place. He'd have to tie him to the outside.

Suddenly he thought of his belt—the same belt he'd taken up to the last notch that morning. He had it off in a flash, and was strapping Glover's limp body to the wing of the racer, to the brace wires. He tugged at it to make sure it would hold. The belt was strong.

Buck leaped to the cockpit, and the



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racer bounded over the rough field. He might not get off, but he'd have the satisfaction of knowing he had done the best he could—for another human being.

The plane dashed across the ground. It was sluggish getting off. Trees loomed before him. The storm made the take-off a terrible hazard. Swirling wind whipped the tiny plane here and there, threatening to set it on the ground just at the tree boundary.

Buck clutched the cowl with his free hand, and was about to cut the switch—the last act before a crash. Then suddenly, another gust picked the plane high in the air and sent it sailing over the tree tops.

If Buck had been offered a million dollars to tell of his struggle through that storm for the next hour, he couldn't have done it. He only knew that his body was battered and bruised and sore. It had been the most terrible battle he had ever made with the elements.

Three times, before he reached the Santa Monica airport, he was tempted to set down in some field and wait. Only the fact that he had a badly injured and perhaps dying man strapped to his wing forced him to go on. Every moment during that long hour, it seemed as though he were done. Time after time his landing gear dragged through tree tops, in spite of his fight to keep altitude. He seemed utterly helpless—and could only hope to keep going—out of the storm.

He tried to climb above it. A down-draft of air struck the ship and carried it along, threatening to bash it in ruins on the ground. But somehow Buck went on, driven by the figure of that unconscious man strapped to his wing with his own belt—the only union between the ship and Glover's hundred and fifty pounds.

He saw the stares of startled surprise on the faces of the attendants at the airport when he got down somehow. He heard them saying some-

thing to him, shouting at him, cheering. They were saying that he'd won, that none of the rest had come through. All were down somewhere or lost.

But Buck only heard them vaguely as he worked with the limp form of Glover. He'd called for an ambulance when he first landed. Now a doctor was helping, making a hasty examination of Glover as he lay on the stretcher.

He looked up and nodded. "He'll pull through, I think. He's been badly cut up. A wonder he didn't bleed to death. Tying him out in the slipstream of the propeller probably saved his life. Dried the blood and stopped the flow."

Buck sat down on his wing a little dizzily. Some one was handing him a piece of leather. He managed to grin at the bloody thing, then put it around his waist and pulled it up. He looked into the air as he heard the sound of a throbbing motor. The storm was letting up in Santa Monica. He saw a Kendall low-wing swing over the port and land. Kendall climbed from the cockpit, looking weak and dizzy.

SOME ONE told Kendall that his pilot had been brought in on the wing. Buck nodded as he asked him about it. Yep. The other ship spun in during the storm. He'd gone down and got Tex Glover. That was all. Kendall beamed at him.

"Rankin," he smiled, "I've given you a raw deal. I took too much for granted from Glover about you. He came to me with the highest of recommendations from a friend of mine out here on the coast. Brought a letter from him. But all that's past now, Rankin. I'll give you a steady job flying my ships any time you want to begin."

Buck straightened with a start, grinning joyously at the big aircraft manufacturer.

"Gee, that's great, Kendall! I'll sure be—"

Suddenly Kendall cut him short

with an exclamation. He was staring across the tarmac at a middle-aged man trotting toward them. Buck saw them shaking hands, and heard Kendall's booming voice.

"Why, Fenton, I didn't expect to see you here. How—"

"I just happened to be down this way and thought I'd come to see you win this race, Ken."

"You're too late," Kendall answered. "This young man won the race. I guess he and I are the only ones to finish so far. Rankin, here, is going to take the place of the pilot you sent me."

Buck saw Fenton stare hard at Kendall. "The pilot I sent you?" he repeated. "I didn't send any pilot."

Kendall was fumbling in his pocket for a letter. He brought it out and handed it to Fenton. Fenton stared at it and shook his head.

"Something's wrong here," he ventured. "That's a good imitation of my signature, but it isn't mine."

Suddenly Buck straightened with a jerk. "Say," he burst out, "I knew I'd seen that guy Glover before. Now I know where. He was a greaseball out at Roosevelt Field. Always talked a big flight with the spectators. I didn't recognize him in his trick outfit. Probably afraid I'd queer him if I got a job flying with you, too, Kendall. That's why he said those things about me. As I remember now, he went to some flying school away from Roosevelt!"

Kendall nodded. "But that's all past, Rankin. You'll have a fine job with me from now on. Let's hope this fellow Glover doesn't die from his foolishness."

Buck started for the office abruptly.

"Gee," he exclaimed, "I almost forgot to send a telegram to Chuck. He'll want to know I won."

"I'll go with you," offered Kendall. "I've got some word to send to Page myself. I'm going to buy the design of his plane, if he'll sell it to me."

It was an hour later when Kendall tore open an answering telegram from Chuck Page. There was one for Buck, too. Buck's was short. He read it in puzzlement—passed it to Kendall.

"Explaining everything in telegram to Kendall. Read his.

"CHUCK."

Kendall's face fell a little, but he managed to smile as he passed his longer telegram to Buck. He read:

"Sorry but design of plane not for sale. Rankin and I will start a company of our own with the prize money.

"CHARLES PAGE."

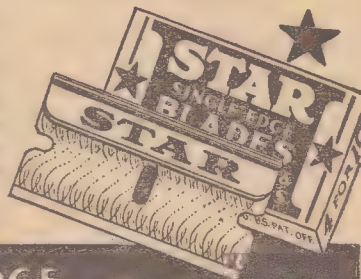
Kendall turned to Buck with a disappointed look. "I suppose that means that you won't fly for me, then, Rankin. Can't say that I blame you. Page has a mighty fine plane there."

Buck beamed back at him. "Well, after all, Kendall," he answered, "I didn't give you any more encouragement than you gave me at the start."



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The Devil's Deadline

By Ralph Powers



In that Balkan hotbed of intrigue were men and women skilled in the sly and subtle game of nations. And against them was a hard-boiled American newspaper correspondent — looking only for hot news.

THE job on the Budapest *Globe* didn't mean much to Philip Drake in a financial way, but as an aid to his real work it was in-

dispensable. It gave him more contacts, more ways of knowing exactly what was going on in that inferno, the Balkans, than any other six meth-

ods. So the prospect of losing it wasn't altogether promising.

Still and all, he knew that Crossley, the city editor, was within his rights. He, Phil Drake, was a poor reporter. He hadn't brought in a hot story in months. And a Hungarian newspaper wants its news hotter than any American tabloid ever did.

Just now, Crossley had humiliated him with the humble job of bailing Jud Strong, a photographing reporter, out of the hoosegow. Crossley had said, "See if you can do that right. Get Strong out of the box at any cost. He's got a dozen pictures that we want right away. Get him out—even if you have to take his place!"

Drake's black curly head bobbed an okay. He was not the talkative type; most men in his real business weren't. All they had to do was think quickly, clearly, accurately—and cleverly.

Not much was known about Drake in Budapest—not much, that is, that was true. He had given the London *Times* as his former place of employment, Wessex as his place of birth, and had admitted a year's scrapping with the British in the Big Fuss. All this when, as a matter of truth, he had never been on the *Times*, was born in Cleveland, Ohio, and had been in the Big Fuss as a quiet but effective member of the American Black Chamber.

Of course, the Black Chamber was no longer in existence, but there had sprung up over night that super-magnet of world developments, the Green Room. Who belonged to it? Only God and the individual knew.

Phil Drake sat in the night court, legs crossed, hat balanced on his knees. Beside him sat a bondsman, who constantly looked at his watch, and yawned.

A squad car rolled over Marx Avenue, swung into Henry Street and squealed to a stop before the Budapest Court House. The back door opened and a row of enormous Hungarian officers ushered the prisoners into the long hall.

Drake saw Strong, and grinned. Strong nodded a "Good boy, Drake," in return. Then Drake watched the girls as they lined up. Some laughed; others were silent. The bondsman chirped through thin, bloodless lips, "Your friend likes his ladies, eh?"

"He's always been that way," absently replied Drake, for the last girl in the line had attracted his attention and caused him to rise from his seat in bewilderment. She seemed different from the others—was different. She carried herself with chin up, moved with graceful, firm strides. She kept trying to stand some distance between herself and the rabble. For this she was rewarded with several vicious thrusts from the officers.

Drake moved to the nearest officer, a tall, husky Hungarian. "That last girl," he said, still eying her. "What is she here for?"

The officer answered sourly, "The usual thing."

"Not she," Drake returned quickly. "Why, she—"

He broke off. The girl had seen him, and a startled expression of recognition swept her face. She shook her head, anxiously imploring him to say nothing. He drew up as tight as a clam, returned the sour look to the officer with a mock grin, and returned to the bondsman.

"You've got a new customer," he informed the bail bondsman.

THEY were in the bail bond office. The bondsman was saying to Jud Strong, the photographer-reporter, "You know you're not to leave the country, and—"

"Sure. I've got work to do. Let me get my name on that paper and get out of here," Strong fired back. He signed, clamped his felt hat on at a rakish angle, and turned to Drake. "Thanks, Drake. Gee, if I'd lost the chance to get these pictures in—"

"Hot, eh?"

"Burning." He disappeared as the door slammed.

Drake turned to the girl. He had paid no attention to her in front of Strong. Strong could figure a story out of anything.

"Mael!" he breathed. "It's been a long time since I last saw you. Where was it, Paris or London?"

"London, July of '18," she smiled. Her voice was rich and full and cultured, and she spoke Hungarian too well for a native. The fineness of her skin and the softness of her hands suggested plainly that her somewhat coarse street suit was out of place, that she would be more at home in an evening gown.

The papers were filled out. Drake motioned her to the desk, watching her well-formed shoulders as she whisked a pen across the forms, signing "Mael Winters."

Outside, a light mist was settling over the streets, rolling down from the vine-covered hills to the east. The girl pulled her light coat closer about her neck, as Drake hailed a creaking taxi and handed the girl in.

Seated, she turned to him. "You don't realize just what you have done for me," she said, seriously.

"Didn't you pick me up in a lumber yard in London when I was just about dead?" he returned. "I haven't forgotten that, you know. And now, what did they put you in for? How long have you been in Budapest? Are you still a British op—"

"Phil!" she silenced him. The word was an exclamation.

"Sorry."

"I've been in Budapest less than four hours," she answered, passing him a forgiving smile. "And I was arrested for—the usual thing!" She hurried to add, "Of course, it was a frame-up."

"The dirty rats!" Drake exploded.

"I thought no one knew I was in Budapest," Mael continued, "but evidently somebody does—somebody who obviously knows what I am here for, at that! As soon as I had registered at a small hotel in an out-of-the-way section of the city, I went to dinner.

When I returned to my room, I knew something was wrong, but just what, I couldn't say.

"After I had taken my coat off, a man suddenly rose from behind the bed. He was almost undressed, and his hair was mussed. He rolled on the bed then, and said 'Hello' in a cocky tone. He had an empty whiskey flask in one hand and smelled vile. Then the *rendör* broke in. What became of the man, I don't know, but it certainly looked as if I—as if my trip had been made for nothing."

DRAKE'S heavy face frowned, and his knuckles whitened. It was a contemptible trick, and he knew it had been pulled by somebody who knew Mael Winters too well to fool with her. She had been connected with the British Department of Secret Agencies, probably was still connected with them. As an English spy, she had been the nemesis of more than one enemy operative.

He said, "The fellow was Hungarian?"

"Yes," she replied. "Not a doubt of it."

"Which leaves us in a peculiar sort of fog, eh?"

"Us?"

"Sure, us!" Drake replied, firmly. "You don't imagine I'm letting you ramble around Budapest unescorted. You didn't let me do that when I was green in London, did you? Okay. Then there's no argument. And who knows but what you'll give me a hot newspaper story? And do I need one!"

Mael shook her head negatively. "No, I can't," she informed him. "Things are likely to get plenty dirty in the next twenty-four hours, especially now that it's certain that somebody knows I am in Budapest, and what I'm here for."

"All the more reason for me to—"

The cab gave a sudden lurch as the driver cursed in Bohemian and clamped on a pair of poor brakes that squealed protestingly. Another cab had swung around the corner ahead

and was bearing down upon their cab. Drake saw the door of the on-coming cab swing open, saw two men in it.

The driver swore again and threw the cab dangerously close to the curb. A crash seemed unavoidable. The driver wrenched open his door and bailed out, landing on the street on all fours. But Drake was watching the men in the back of the on-coming cab. One was hidden almost completely. The other was short, hatchetlike, and very dark. Drake caught a glint of light on metal.

To see was to act, with him. He gave his companion a thrust that sprawled her on the floor. None too soon! Glass showered throughout the cab as a heavy-handled knife crashed through the door pane and plunked into the leatherette seat exactly where Mael had been a fraction of a second before.

Then the cab climbed the curb, side-swiped a light pole, and backslid into a brick building, where the motor stalled.

Drake thrust open the nearest door and scrambled out, but the car of the would-be knifer was no longer visible. He swung upon the girl. "Hurt, Mael?" he asked.

"No, but can you hit!" He rubbed her shoulder where he had pounded her. "But come on, let's get out of here before we both go back to jail."

Together they quickly disappeared around the nearest corner, turned into an alley, and then broke into a run. The British agent was almost as fast on her feet as her escort. She had to be, in her business. More than once her life had depended on those feet.

Out on a main street again, they slowed to a walk. Drake turned to her. "You had better not go back to your room," he said. "Whoever is behind this will just make more trouble."

"That's twice in a couple of hours," she said.

Drake shook his head, frowned, and pushed his hat back upon his head.

"Wrong, young lady," he said, evenly but meaningly. "That's once for each."

"What?" Puzzled, perplexed.

"What I said," Drake concluded. "Once for each. You've got two sets of people against you now—not one!"

"But, Phil, I don't understand. Nobody knew I was coming here but my immediate superiors. You know they're few, and a hundred per cent English. There's not a chance of their slipping information. One person might catch on—but never two!"

"Nevertheless, there are two," Drake told her firmly. "And from now on, I'm sticking with you, regardless of what you say. You don't know this town."

"But two factions, Phil—"

"Listen, that hotel stunt wasn't the work of an Oriental. No Oriental would ruin a woman's reputation even for a minute, much less a day. And that knife-throwing act isn't the work of a European. When a German, Frenchman, or Hungarian has a murder to do, he's a little more at home with a revolver. Thus, two factions. Understand?"

DRAKE drew up before a store and looked inside. It appeared absent of customers. Taking Mael's arm, he ushered her in. Telephone in hand, he barked a number.

"Hello, you, Jean? . . . All right, cut the funny stuff! Listen, I've got a girl friend. . . . Yeah, an old-time friend. . . . No, not nearly as pretty as you." He grinned at Mael. "I'm bringing her over. Somebody did a dirty trick on her. Be right over."

Jean Kish was just what Drake had said, a pretty, blue-eyed, blonde Hungarian. She liked Drake, and Drake knew she was reliable. Beyond that, Drake knew she was a quick thinker and as smart as a whip. She could be trusted with anybody's life.

Now she brought fine Hungarian wine and glasses. She gazed first at Drake and then at Mael, then said,

"I think she is beautiful, Phil." It was honest admiration. "English?"

Mael nodded. "And thank you," she smiled.

Drake suggested innocently, looking through arched brows, "Do you want to get me some cigarettes from the corner?"

Jean frowned, then laughed. "Okay. Just throw me out the window."

"Five minutes, that's all," Drake pleaded.

Jean was gone. Drake turned to Mael. "How much of what's going on can you tell me?" he asked.

"Only that I am after an important formula from the Hungarian War Department," she replied. "I'll get it tomorrow, and then return immediately."

Drake nodded, understanding. Then he asked, "And what has the Earl of Sandingham to do with this thing?"

Mael took a long time to answer. "Just a blind. He came over with all the pomp and ceremony due him, but he goes back empty-handed. With all the noise they gave him, headquarters thought I'd be able to slip in unnoticed."

"You did—except by two factions."

"And possibly the very ones we wanted to evade. The others didn't count."

"No? And who were the two?"

Mael shrugged. "That's not easy to say. But Germany goes in deeply for war formulas. Japan, too."

"That brings America into the mess."

Mael nodded. "Yes. America developed the airplane stabilizer that Hungary wants, and it's America who really gets Hungary's formula for the liquid gun powder. The trade was made by England at Geneva, but Germany got the conference to refuse to allow the actual papers to be passed there. Japan got wind of what was going on and teamed up with Germany. Now, I guess it's each nation for itself, and both are probably trying to get the formula, and to blaze with the other."

"But I still don't see how England got mixed up in this if America made the stabilizer and gets the formula."

"Well, England bought the stabilizer rights, as I understand. At Geneva, Lord Sandingham heard about this liquid gun powder. There was nothing we had that was of so much value to the Hungarians as the stabilizer. It didn't belong to England. England had only rights to use it on her airplanes. So Sandingham got in touch with America, explained the value of liquid gun powder, which America wasn't slow in seeing, anyway, and the trade was made. But suppose the formula got into the hands of the Germans. America would say that England deliberately allowed this to happen. It would look queer, at that."

DRAKE was thoughtful. It certainly would be a bad break if Germany or Japan placed their hooks on the formula. Suddenly he asked, "But what the deuce is the value of this liquid explosive, Mael? We've got explosives now that will rock the state of Jersey if they go off."

"This particular explosive has a low specific gravity. It will float on water and won't mix with it. Suppose a few tank cars of it are dumped into some port and set off with a long-range incendiary shell—what a swell blaze it would make!"

"I believe you're a fire-bug, Mael," he taunted.

But Mael continued sober. "Suppose a submarine had this as ballast. The submarine is sunk by depth bombs. The ballast rises to the top of the water—liquid gun powder. An incendiary exploding torpedo follows it up and sets it off. And the powder blasts to pieces the ship that sent the submarine to the bottom! Two or three of these, and there wouldn't be a battleship on the ocean that would go near a submarine. Phil, if that powder got into wrong hands, it would be too bad for a good many seaports in this world!"

Drake nodded. He could understand that.

"But the thing that gets under my skin is why they tried to plant you in jail before you had received the formula from the War Department," he said, meditatively. "If you had already received the formula, I could understand it. But without it—what good would you be in jail?"

Mael shook her head. "I can't imagine, Phil, but there must be some reason. Some deep reason, too."

She broke off. The door opened. Jean Kish poked her pretty, marcelled head into the room.

"Come on in," Drake replied, rising. "Mael here was just telling me how well she can cook. I'll be going now, but you keep her here and make her cook breakfast. Be seein' you in the morning."

IT was inky black on the streets now. The mist from the vineyards had turned to drenching fog. Drake shouldered his way through this to his two-room apartment. Pressing the lights on, he stood accustoming himself to the light when two men rose from different parts of the living-room. Each had a Luger in his steady, kill-ready hand.

Surprised, startled, Drake made a move to back out the door, but the guns swung up, lining with his eyes. He could look down both black, anxious barrels. And they dampened his ardor to retreat.

In the fleeting instant that he recognized one of the men as Baron von Rossveldt, a whole book of incidents went through his mind. And his eyes betrayed recognition of the gray-haired, monocled Teuton.

During the war, the Baron had been the famous and unscrupulous K-14, of whom it was said that he knew more about English submarine movements than did the English government itself. Nor was this idle chatter, for twice K-14 had counterfeited orders for mass submarine movements down the Thames, only to have

them run into newly placed and uncharted mines. It was popular knowledge that the Thames was K-14's graveyard for English submarines. And what a price had been on his head in those days!

K-14 had effective, if hard, methods. Drake, as a member of the American Black Chamber in England, had had valuable information. K-14 wanted it. Knocked unconscious on the streets of London, Drake had been taken to a dingy room near Soho. Ropes had almost choked him to death; other ropes had snapped two of his arm bones. But K-14 had never secured any knowledge from him.

Now K-14 stood before him again, Luger in hand. He was older in appearance, had gray hair. His burning brown eyes were still small and squinted, his long nose sharp and Teutonic. His chin was square, and his features harsh and irregular.

Certainly, Drake was sure, this Teuton wasn't working for Germany now—at least, not directly. His cruel assassination of two French women without authority after the Armistice had brought about international complications that had forced him to be outlawed from any type of governmental work. And for the safety of his skin he had fled to Holland at the time. Now, of course, he might be a free-lance spy, and probably was, selling his information to German councils.

"Come in, *mein friend*," K-14 breathed, as if his tongue were searing flame.

"Sure. Back at your old tricks, I see," Drake replied. "What's it now—submarine information? You ought to know I am as hard as hell to get talking."

"You'll talk." The German smiled suavely. "Where is she?"

"Who?"

The other German, to whom he had not paid the slightest attention, slid quietly across the room. Now he brought his Luger sharply down upon the side of Drake's skull. Stars and



half-moons danced in the room, and his knees buckled, but he kept his senses.

"Don't ask stupid questions," snapped K-14. "Where is she?"

"What are you talkin' about?" repeated Drake, moving quickly so that another blow wouldn't trouble him.

"That English girl," K-14 replied. "You took her from jail—"

"Where you sent her." Drake's eyes searched the German's face for information, but the spy bluntly admitted, "Where I sent her. And what did you do with her?"

"After the accident I sent her home." It was a shot in the dark. K-14's eyes opened perceptibly. The accident was unknown to him, Drake was now certain. And that proved that some one else was in on Mael Winters' deal.

"You lie! Come on, talk up, or I'll break your neck. Talk!" The two men closed in.

The telephone halted their steps. K-14 whirled upon it, shot a suspicious glance at Drake, and then lifted the receiver. Holding his hand over the mouthpiece, he said, "You mutter a word, and it will be your last." Then into the phone, "Hello."

"Hello, Phil?" Drake heard Jean Kish's voice.

"Uh, yes, this is Phil," lied K-14.

"It—say, you're not Phil Drake. Where is Phil? Operator! Operator! There is trouble up in Phil Drake's apartment. Call the *rendör*!"

K-14 banged down the receiver emphatically.

"Drake, you listen to me," he snapped, brows climbing to savage wrinkles. "You help that British girl get those formulas out of Hungary and I'll ride you to death. Keep away!"

"Go on. I'm tied. Get out before she has all the cops in Hungary down here. She's a sweet little Hunky, and likes me a lot. Beat it!"

When K-14 had left with his agent, Drake called Jean.

"Thanks," he said, softly. "You got me out of a tight spot. No, I'm not hurt. Now go to sleep and keep an eye on her. She's in more danger than I am. G'night!"

THE next morning's *Globe* carried the flaming headlines:

EARL OF SANDINGHAM
BRITAIN'S ENVOY

John, Earl of Sandingham, arrived in Budapest yesterday as England's envoy to complete the transaction that will enable Hungary to compete with the world's largest and strongest airplane manufacturers. It is expected that this

Drake studied the paper reflectively and shook his head in disgust as he threw it on the desk before Crossley, the city editor.

"If you can't get hot news, you print lies," commented Drake, sourly. "Oh, well, it's your rag—"

Crossley gazed up, studied him, then grunted.

"Maybe our star reporter, Phil Drake, who might draw his last pay next Saturday, knows something else the Earl is here for," he suggested sarcastically.

"Maybe—later in the day," Drake taunted, grinning. "And will your face be red!"

"Get fresh, and will your eyes be black!" shot back Crossley, nodding as though he meant it. "Just for good luck, suppose you trot on down to the morgue and see who that stiff is they brought in early this morning."

"Name?" asked Drake.

"I don't know. Some wench, stabbed a couple of times. Good-looker, the report says, but nobody seems to know her. You know everything; maybe you know everybody. Go on, beat it. We don't want the information for next week. We want it for the afternoon edition."

At the morgue, Drake was ushered into the frost box by a sleepy-eyed attendant. A young girl on a slab was unveiled for him. At the sight of her, his jaw fell, and his face drained of all color. He looked closer, touched

her soft skin with the back of his hand. There could be no doubt of it—it was Mael Winters!

"Know her?" the attendant asked.

"Huh? No. Thought I did at first." His lie was effective.

"Another fellow thought he recognized her at first." The attendant's pale eyes seemed to yawn with his mouth. "But he was mistaken, just like you."

"Another fellow?" Drake came to attention. "When?"

"Twenty minutes ago."

"What did he look like?"

"He was big, and had gray hair." He yawned again, slowly. "But that's all I know."

"Hungarian, too, I suppose," suggested Drake.

"Oh, no. He was plenty German."

It didn't take K-14 long to find out things. That was the way he had been during the war.

Outside, Drake made a rush to a telephone and snapped a number into the mouthpiece. His heart pounded with wrath. A voice answered.

"Hello, Jean," he said. "Phil. What the devil is the big idea of letting that kid get away? I told you to watch her. Good Lord, she's down in the morgue now. And—"

"Couldn't you sleep it off last night?" Jean demanded. "Well, go home and sleep some more. A man as drunk as you—"

"Don't give me a lot of lip. I tell you—"

"Tell it to the *kapitany*," she returned. "Miss Winters is right here with me now."

Drake shook his head. Was he drunk, after all? "You're sure?"

"Yes. She uses two lumps of sugar in her coffee. No, it's three, Phil. Hear the third one drop?"

Drake was more than puzzled. He was bewildered. That girl on the morgue slab was a perfect ringer for Mael Winters. And she had been stabbed. Not shot, but stabbed—an Oriental trick. Could it be that the

Oriental who had hurled a knife at Mael the night before had killed the wrong person?

His mind was a riot of thought, as a blinding light suddenly burst upon him. Then he said, "Jean, tell Mael to get me a picture of herself right away. If she hasn't got one handy, slip out and buy a camera. The paper will pay for it. Yes, a snapshot will do. See you in twenty minutes."

His brain was a riot of thoughts. K-14 thought Mael Winters was dead, but he didn't know that Drake knew it. So what? So K-14 would be informed about it—informed in pretty big type.

Back at the morgue again, Drake studied the girl more closely. There was small wonder that this girl had been mistaken for Mael Winters. Only her hair was different, he saw now, and that had been hidden by a hat. It was a strange coincidence.

THE late morning edition of the afternoon *Globe* carried a two-column picture of Mael Winters and the caption:

BRITISH GIRL STABBED
IDENTITY UNKNOWN

Early this morning a girl, apparently British, was found stabbed to death on St. Christopher *Utea*. The absence of a passport on her person made it impossible to ascertain her identity. The *rendor* state that she had been dead less than an hour when found.

Exceptionally pretty, brown hair, and five feet—

"And that," Drake glanced at Mael, tapping the paper suggestively with his right hand, "is your passport for free movement in this town. The Orientals think they killed you, and K-14 will turn his attention to other channels when he sees that even I believe you are dead. You are now free to go and come as you please."

Mael smiled. "You're a genius, Phil."

"But now you've got to get busy," he continued. "The London plane leaves at 2:30. You get the formula, and I'll meet you at the plane to see

you off. Good luck. And you'd better wear some of Jean's clothes, just for safety."

On the street again, Drake inhaled a deep breath. He felt suddenly relieved of a lot of trouble. He admitted that he might be a bum reporter, but as an agent for the American Green Room, he felt clever enough to cook up a good excuse for a fellow friend. Never in his life had he stumbled on a more lucky break. It warranted a drink, and he forthright maneuvered through the swinging doors of a café and ordered a rich brand of Tokay.

He was still pleased with himself when he turned to leave the establishment. As he did, he found burly Hungarian officers on either side of him, armed with manacles. Ahead of him was K-14, his eyes grinning, but evil.

"That's the man, officer," K-14 said, his bullish voice booming.

"All right. Fellow, you're under arrest."

Drake struggled to keep cool. This would take more than hot-headed words, he felt certain. Somehow K-14 had managed to turn the tables on him.

"Yeah? What for?" he demanded.

"For *gyilkoläs*."

"Murder?" echoed Drake.

"Precisely. For the *gyilkoläs* of that young English girl found on the streets this morning. You were the last seen with her. You aided her from jail, and you didn't take her home. There was trouble at your apartment last night, also. The telephone operator was notified by some woman."

"Why, you dumb—" Drake broke off. There would be time to talk later. He mustn't disclose the fact that Mael was still alive. Three more hours, and the formula would be safe in the air. Then would be the time to talk. After all, once the girl he had escorted from jail reappeared, they would have to let him go.

"Hell, night life is killing me, any-

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way," he yawned. "Let's move. I need the rest."

K-14 followed them, an irritating grin on his face. Inside headquarters, he asked to see Drake alone.

"He is a particular friend of mine." He smiled mirthlessly. "Only I couldn't see even him get away with murder."

"I understand," the kapitany said. "Tell the guards I said you could see him."

Facing Drake, K-14 beamed. "You Yanks are a brainy lot!"

Drake made no reply, though his blood boiled with an urge to throttle von Rossveldt for that crack. He wondered just how much the German really knew. He wasn't long finding out.

"It was clever of you to say that girl in the morgue was our British friend," K-14 taunted, his lips tapered with sarcasm. "But before you make such statements, you ought to find out who she really is, and who her friends are. You'd save yourself a lot of embarrassment."

"You mean you—you know who she is?" It was incredible.

K-14 nodded. "I brought her from Germany because she looked so much like your British friend. With her, I intended—"

But Drake wasn't listening. What a fool he had been. He knew only too well what K-14 was saying—that the fake arrest had been made because this German girl would have been able to take her place at the War Department, secure the formula, and turn it over to K-14.

His eyes lifted slowly, suspiciously. "You—you killed her?"

K-14 shook his head. "No-o," he said. "That was the work of—of other factions." He paused. "I hope they still believe it is your friend. That will give me a clear field—a very clear field. And now you can sit here and keep cool. When I have the formula, I'll let the girl come and free you. By the way, how much do you think the

(Continued on page 88)

A Money-Making Opportunity

for Men of Character

EXCLUSIVE FRANCHISE FOR

AN INVENTION EXPECTED TO REPLACE
A MULTI-MILLION-DOLLAR INDUSTRY

Costly Work Formerly
"Sent Out" by Business Men
Now Done by Themselves
at a Fraction of the Expense

This is a call for men everywhere to handle
exclusive agency for one of the most
unique business inventions of the day.

Forty years ago the horse and buggy business was supreme—today almost extinct. Twenty years ago the phonograph industry ran into many millions—today practically a relic. Only a comparatively few foresighted men saw the fortunes ahead in the automobile and the radio. Yet irresistible waves of public buying swept these men to fortune, and sent the buggy and the phonograph into the discard. So are great successes made by men able to detect the shift in public favor from one industry to another.

Now another change is taking place. An old established industry—an integral and important part of the nation's structure—in which millions of dollars change hands every year—is in thousands of cases being replaced by a truly astonishing, simple invention which does the work better—more reliably—AND AT A COST OFTEN AS LOW AS 2% OF WHAT IS ORDINARILY PAID! It has not required very long for men who have taken over the rights to this valuable invention to do a remarkable business, and show earnings which in these times are almost unheard of for the average man.

Not a "Gadget"—
Not a "Knick-Knack"—

but a valuable, proved device which
has been sold successfully by busi-
ness novices as well as seasoned
veterans.

Make no mistake—this is no novelty—no flimsy creation which the inventor hopes to put on the market. You probably have seen nothing like it yet—perhaps never dreamed of the existence of such a device—yet it has already been used by corporations of outstanding prominence—by dealers of great corporations—by their branches—by doctors, newspapers, publishers—schools—hospitals, etc., etc., and by thousands of small business men. You don't have to convince a man that he should use an electric bulb to light his office instead of a gas lamp. Nor do you have to sell the same business man the idea that some day he may need something like this invention. The need is already there—the money is usually being spent right at that very moment—and the desirability of saving the greatest part of this expense is obvious immediately.

Some of the Savings
You Can Show

You walk into an office and put down before your prospect a letter from a sales organization showing that they did work in their own office for \$11 which formerly could have cost them over \$200. A building supply corporation pays our man \$70, whereas the bill could have been for \$1,600! An automobile dealer pays our representative \$15, whereas the expense could have been over \$1,000. A department store has expense of \$88.60, possible cost if done outside the business being well over \$2,000. And so on. We could not possibly list all cases here. These are just a few of the many actual cases which we place in your hands to work with. Practically every line of business and every section of the country is represented by these field reports which hammer across dazzling, convincing money-saving opportunities which hardly any business man can fail to understand.

Profits Typical of
the Young, Growing Industry

Going into this business is not like selling something offered in every grocery, drug or department store. For instance, when you take a \$7.50 order, \$5.83 can be your share. On \$1,500 worth of business, your share can be \$1,167.00. The very least you get as your part of every dollar's worth of business you do is 67 cents—on ten dollars' worth \$6.70, on a hundred dollars' worth \$67.00—in other words two thirds of every order you get is yours. Not only on the first order—but on repeat orders—and you have the opportunity of earning an even larger percentage.

This Business Has
Nothing to Do With
House to House Canvassing

Nor do you have to know anything about high-pressure selling. "Selling" is unnecessary in the ordinary sense of the word. Instead of hammering away at the customer and trying to "force" a sale, you make a dignified, business-like call, leave the installation—whatever size the customer says he will accept—at our risk, let the customer sell himself after the device is in and working. This does away with the need for pressure on the customer—it eliminates the handicap of trying to get the money before the customer has really convinced himself 100%. You simply tell what you offer, showing proof of success in that customer's particular line of business. Then leave the invention without a dollar down. It starts working at once. In a few short days, the installation should actually produce enough cash money to pay for the deal, with profits above the investment coming in at the same time. You then call back, collect your money. Nothing is so convincing as our offer to let results speak for themselves without risk to the customer! While others fail to get even a hearing, our men are making sales running into the hundreds. They have received the attention of the largest firms in the country, and sold to the smallest businesses by the thousands.

EARNINGS

One man in California earned over \$1,600 per month for three months—close to \$5,000 in 90 days' time. Another writes from Delaware—"Since I have been operating (just a little less than a month of actual selling) and not the full day at that, because I have been getting organized and had to spend at least half the day in the office; counting what I have sold outright and on trial, I have made just a little in excess of one thousand dollars profit for one month." A Connecticut man writes he has made \$55.00 in a single day's time. Texas man nets over \$300 in less than a week's time. Space does not permit mentioning here more than these few random cases. However, they are sufficient to indicate that the worthwhile future in this business is coupled with immediate earnings for the right kind of man. One man with us has already made over a thousand sales on which his earnings ran from \$5 to \$60 per sale and more. A great deal of this business was repeat business. Yet he had never done anything like this before coming with us. That is the kind of opportunity this business offers. The fact that this business has attracted to it such business men as former bankers, executives of businesses—men who demand only the highest type of opportunity and income—gives a fairly good picture of the kind of business this is. Our door is open, however, to the young man looking for the right field in which to make his start and develop his future.

No Money Need Be Risked

In trying this business out. You can measure the possibilities and not be out a dollar. If you are looking for a business that is not overcrowded—a business that is just coming into its own—on the upgrade, instead of the downgrade—a business that offers the buyer relief from a burdensome, but unavoidable expense—a business that has a prospect practically in every office, store, or factory into which you can set foot—regardless of size—that is a necessity but does not have any price cutting to contend with as other necessities do—that because you control the sales in exclusive territory is your own business—that pays more on some individual sales than many men make in a week and sometimes in a month's time—if such a business looks as if it is worth investigating, get in touch with us at once for the rights in your territory—don't delay—because the chances are that if you do wait, someone else will have written to us in the meantime—and if it turns out that you were the better man—we'd both be sorry. So, for convenience, use the coupon below—but send it right away—or wire if you wish. But do it now. Address

F. E. ARMSTRONG, President
Dept. 4079D Mobile, Ala.

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F. E. ARMSTRONG, Pres., Dept. 4079D Mobile, Ala.
Without obligation to me, send me full information on your proposition.

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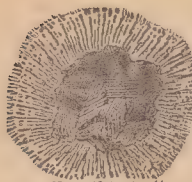
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ASTROL CO., Dept 81, Main P. O.

Box 72, BROOKLYN, N. Y.

NOTICE! Beware of imitations! We absolutely GUARANTEE these Genuine Brahma Lodestones are ALIVE! We believe they are just what you want, the REAL THING—POWERFUL DRAWING, EXTRA HIGHLY MAGNETIC! Fully Guaranteed—Order TODAY! Copyright 1937—A. Co.

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TO BE SET TO MUSIC

Free Examination. Send Your Poems To

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BACHELOR OF MUSIC

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Send for FREE TRIAL of NOXALCO, a guaranteed harmless home treatment. Can be given secretly in food or drink to anyone who drinks or craves Whiskey, Beer, Gin, Wine, etc. Your request for Free Trial brings trial supply by return mail and full \$2.00 treatment which you may try under 30 day refund guarantee at our risk. ARLEE CO H62, BALTIMORE, MD.

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Neglected early symptoms may lead to serious trouble later. Write for FREE BOOKLET. Gives experiences of grateful users and facts about 30-year-old easy-to-take palliative home treatment.

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Brand new, in original factory packages and guaranteed.

38 Cal. No. 194



Double action, solid frame, hammer model, hand ejector; 2 1/2", nickel and blue octagon barrel, rubber stocks. Ideal revolver for home protection or carrying; safe and sure-fire. (Regular price \$7.50) Special \$5.45.

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Automatics: 32 Cal. 8 shot, \$7.85; 10 shot Mil. Mod. \$8.95.

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etc. Send 3c stamp.

LEE SALES CO. (Dept. MP) 35 W. 32nd St., N. Y. City

(Continued from page 86)

Fatherland will pay for a liquid powder formula—half a million marks?"

DRAKE cursed fluently as he watched the rugged Teuton parade down the stone corridor.

Mael Winters was in a tough spot now, he meditated. She imagined herself unwanted by anybody, and with the formula in her possession, she would be at the mercy of the ravaging K-14. Of course, she wouldn't submit freely, but K-14 had methods that made even tough men break down.

That he was unable to help her now, Drake realized. To warn her that their *coup de maitre* had turned into a fizzle was equally impossible. But was it? A thought struck him with all the force of a Luger's butt. He bounded to the door, wrapped his big hands around two bars and yelled for a guard. His call was particularly vicious, and half a dozen men came running.

"Let me at a telephone," Drake demanded. "It's life and death. It's—"

"Nem!" a surly officer replied.

"No? I tell you it is necessary," insisted Drake, his fists knotting tighter on the steel grating. "There's a girl who is going to get into a lot of trouble. I can keep her out of it, only I—"

"Nem!"

"Well, just don't say I didn't warn you. Because if anything happens to that girl in Hungary, your heads won't be worth a damn. She's here on business with the War Department—"

"War Department?" Eyes opened all around. The name was like the magic of Aladdin's lamp.

Drake saw that he had struck a vulnerable spot. "That's right. And she's in trouble now, maybe. If a telephone call can reach her—"

It was only a matter of minutes before he was at the telephone. He barked a number, heard the burring of the ring repeat itself. His heart sank, and the color now drained completely

(Continued on page 90)

MEN OVER 40 GLAND TROUBLE

Vibratherm

Must Help Your Condition
Or It COSTS NOTHING To Try

IF YOU Suffer the misery of Pro-

The entire nervous system may be severely affected by prostatic disorders.

state trouble—have to get up nights—feel weak and tired—try **VIBRATHERM for 10 Days with no risk.** Many users enthusiastically praise it. **VIBRATHERM**

employs both heat and vibration (massage) to encourage the flow of health-giving blood to the afflicted organs—this is a method recognized by medical profession as a proper treatment for prostatic trouble. Just send your name and address for valuable information and **10-DAY FREE TRIAL Offer.** Write Dept. 11.

Prostate trouble may lead to serious complications.

Vitaphore Appliances, Inc.
1063 Fairfax Av. Pythian Bldg.
Hollywood, Calif. So. Bend, Ind.

IF YOU WANT ROMANCE

and long for an affectionate sweetheart with money, write me. All letters answered and held confidential.

MARY LEE

Box 445-S

Rolla, Mo.

LONELY?

Join a National Church Organization. Un-denominational. Sure to have a select helpmate for you. Stamp and age bring full particulars. **REV. JONES, P. O. Box 2459, Kansas City, Mo.**

MEN & WOMEN

Losing your pep? Tried most remedies and still discouraged? Enjoy life again. Try this wonderful gland tonic, "Stonite". For a limited time only you can get a 2 months supply of this remarkable vitality builder for only \$8.00. Send at once to "Stonite", Box 60, Ridgewood P.O. Brooklyn, N. Y.

LONESOME?

Find your Sweetheart or Mate, the Modern way. Thousands of lonely men and women have been made happy. Why not you? Join the Modern Club. Ladies and Gentlemen everywhere. Confidential, free information in plain sealed envelope. **MODERN CLUB, P.O. Box 122-M, Sheboygan, Wis.**

LONELY? My personal service arranges romantic or friendly correspondence. Find your mate through confidential, select club. New members receive complimentary copy of "Personality." Free sealed information. Write today.
ROBT. RANDOLPH, Box 213, Jacksonville, Fla.

GET ACQUAINTED CLUB

Confidential introductions by letter. Members in every State seeking congenial mates. Many wealthy. If lonely, write
R. E. SIMPSON, BOX 1251, DENVER, COLO.

PROSTATE SUFFERERS

Prostate gland acute or chronic, rheumatism, kidney and bladder sufferers, send for **FREE** trial package, amazing results. Endorsed by doctors.

PROSTEX COMPANY, Dept. 73, Miami, Oklahoma

LONELY HEARTS

Join the world's greatest social extension bureau: Happiness awaits you, correspondents everywhere seeking congenial mates. Many wealthy. 37 years of dependable dignified confidential service. Let us arrange a romantic correspondence for you. Quick results guaranteed. Photos descriptions, introductions Free. Send no money.

STANDARD CLUB, BOX C

GRAYS LAKE, ILLINOIS

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Do You Want A Baby?



HUNDREDS upon hundreds of women from Coast to Coast, formerly childless for years from functional sterility, and even often told they could never have children, **ARE NOW PROUD AND HAPPY MOTHERS** from knowledge and use of a simple home method—details of which I send **FREE** on request. Parents are admittedly far happier, healthier, more contented, more prosperous and actually live longer as a class than childless couples! A baby gives the real home spirit and ties a husband and wife in truest enduring love and mutual interests. The majority of discontented, unhappy marriages are those of childless couples. *Copr. 1936*

Get This Knowledge FREE

During my 36 years of practice in functional conditions of women I developed this home method, which is described in my illustrated treatise sent **FREE ON REQUEST.** It discusses many subjects relating to the female organs and tells how you too may combat your troubles as thousands of others have who reported arrival of babies after being childless for years, and report as well satisfactory relief from the various female troubles amenable to correction by this home method. **DR. H. WILL ELDERS 7th & Felix Sts., Suite 202-D ST. JOSEPH, MISSOURI**

WEALTHY SWEETHEARTS

Rich and beautiful women, well-to-do doctors and lawyers, others of nearly every description have joined our club. Why not you? Send 10c for illustrative photos and descriptions. **JANE FULLER CLUB, Box 797-AB, Milwaukee, Wis.**

HAPPINESS

Let us help you find the right helpmate. Confidential. Write for details. **P. O. Box 148, Riverside, Illinois.**

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR MEN AND WOMEN WHOSE

GLANDS NEED THIS HELP

Here is a money back trial offer that men and women suffering from weak glands won't want to miss. A scientific formula, designed to stimulate all the glands in their normal, vigorous, health-giving functions, called **GRAND MOGUL PELLETS**, is offered on a test at our risk basis. Send \$1.00 (3 boxes \$2.00) for a 2 weeks supply. Follow directions for 7 days. If you are not satisfied with results return remaining pellets for your money back. You are the sole judge so act today. Write **PROOVEN REMEDIES CO., Dept. AG-1, Irving Park Station, Chicago, Ill.**

A ROMANCE FOR YOU

Eight page pen-pal magazine full of pictures, descriptions of pretty ladies, handsome men seeking correspondents, sent for 10c.

Federal, P. O. Box 344, Dept. 53, Indianapolis, Ind.

LONELY?

Join this reliable Club established 17 years. Feel the thrill of Romance. Members everywhere, many wealthy. Descriptions Free, sealed.
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Join the original **PERSONAL SERVICE** for particular people. Dignified, dependable and sure. We get **RESULTS.** Members everywhere. Write **TODAY** for information sent you in **PLAIN** sealed envelopes.

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BOX 14-V KINGSBRIDGE STATION NEW YORK CITY
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LONESOME?

Why not try our strictly high class Confidential Service to meet your ideal sweetheart or mate. A stamp brings all details.
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MEN

Get free booklet about **Zo-ak Tablets**—the formula of well-known New York physician created especially for men. **Zo-ak** contains quick-acting vegetable stimulants plus essential vitamin concentrates in adequate amounts to build up health and strength. Ask for **Zo-ak** (blue box) at any good druggist, and write for free booklet by registered physician. Sent in sealed envelope by **ZO-AK COMPANY, 54 West 45 St., Dept. A, New York.**

TIRED OF LOATHSOME SCHOOL-AGE PIMPLES?

Let millions of tiny, living plants help keep blood free of skin irritants

Thousands of young people have said good-by to the curse of youth—a pimply skin. They know what happens between the ages of 13 and 25, the time of life when important glands develop. Your system is upset. Poisons may pollute your blood stream and bubble out on your skin in ugly pimples. Then you need to cleanse and purify your blood.

Let Fleischmann's Yeast help remove these impurities the natural way. Millions of tiny, active, *living* yeast plants will help keep poisons from the blood and help to heal your broken-out skin. Many report amazing results in 30 days or less. Start eating Fleischmann's Yeast now. Buy some tomorrow!

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Make Secret Investigations

Earn Big money. Work home or travel. Fascinating work. Experience unnecessary. **DETECTIVE** Particulars **FREE**. Write to **GEO. T. N. WAGNER, 2640 Broadway, N.Y.**



START \$1260 to \$2100 YEAR MEN—WOMEN

Many 1938 appointments expected.

Qualify at once.

Mail Coupon immediately—sure.

Franklin Institute
Dept. N233
Rochester, N. Y.

Gentlemen: Rush to me, **FREE** of charge, list of U. S. Government big pay dependable jobs. Send **FREE** 32-page book describing salaries, vacations, hours, work, etc. Tell me how to qualify for one of these jobs.

Name

Address

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(Continued from page 88)

from his face. Mael had already left. But Jean—what of her? Why didn't she answer?

Drake retraced his steps to the cell. What could be done? Something had to be. Mael Winters' life was at stake—and Jean's, perhaps.

Suddenly he paused in his tracks, whirled about, and raced again to the phone. Jerking the receiver from the hook, he shot a number into the mouthpiece.

"G'me city editor," he barked. "Forget who it is. G'me Crossley. . . Crossley? . . . Drake. I'm in the hoose-gow. . . Charges?—Murder. . . Nobody, you sap, but I've got to get out, or there's goin' to be another. . . No, I'm not going to murder anybody here. Listen.

"You know that dame we said was dead—stabbed to death on the streets early this morning? . . . Well, she isn't dead. . . No! . . . But I tell you the one that's in the morgue is another one. They look exactly alike. . . What'd I do that for? Because—say, you get me out of here for an hour and I'll give you the biggest story you ever had. There won't be another paper in the city with it. Spies, formulas, Earl Sandingham posing as a dummy, Orientals, murder—right here in Budapest. . . Sure, I'll be waitin' for you. Send Strong down to get me out."

"**WE** take turns getting each other out," Strong said, laughing as he took Drake's cell. "The minute I told them the dame's name was Mael Winters, they believed I'd killed her. And say, you're sure this Winters dame is alive?"

"Oh, sure," Drake consoled him.

"Because I don't want those *rendör* boys to have to keep me too long."

On the street Drake hailed a taxi. Crossley was waiting for him at the *Globe* office.

"What's this about spies?" he began.

"Forget it," returned Drake. "What have you got on von Rossveldt?"

"The Baron?"

"Yes."

"Nothing, except his war record."

"Know where he lives?"

"Lives? Is he in Budapest?"

Drake's fingers laced his hair as he tried to pull a fistful free. "And you talk about the *Globe* wanting hot news! Damn it, you don't even know a hot man when you get one in the city. Get the War Department on the phone. See what they know."

They knew exactly nothing.

Drake rubbed his heavy brows with the heel of his hand, as though trying to press away an oncoming fog. "Then get the Department of Emigration," he finally ordered.

They knew something, but not much. Von Rossveldt had been in Budapest six weeks before, had stamped out for Holland via the Amsterdam-Magyar Air Lines, and was consequently not in the country. Crossley hung up the receiver.

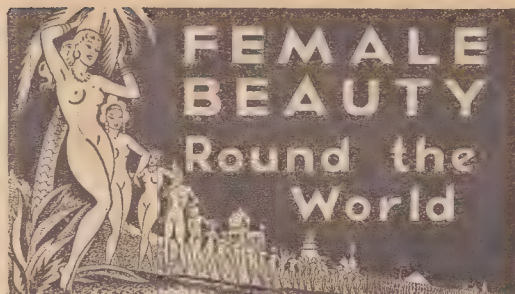
Drake chewed his lips. "No wonder you lost the war," he muttered. "Anybody that takes the word of von Rossveldt is a fool—and here's a whole Emigration Department—"

The sharp jangle of the phone cut him short. His eyes followed Crossley as the telephone was answered. Crossley pushed the instrument forward. "For you," he said.

Drake answered it, then listened. The room grew tense. "You say it's on St. Anthony *Utca*? Big brown house, eh? Okay, darling. You're made of the right stuff. But about those brownies—no, I can't dope them out. It was one of them that hurled a knife at Mael last night, but it was too dark to make them out. Be seein' you."

The receiver crashed. Drake swung on Crossley.

"The kid that called then is better than the whole damned staff of this newspaper," he said fiercely. "You included! Now get this straight. In exactly five minutes call the *rendör*. Send them out to 512 St. Anthony *Utca*. Tell them to send a raiding squad."



World's Greatest Collection of Strange & Secret Photographs

NOW you can travel round the world with the most daring adventurers. You can see with your own eyes, the weirdest peoples on earth. You witness the strangest customs of the red, white, brown, black and yellow races. You attend their startling rites, their mysterious practices. They are all assembled for you in these five great volumes of the **SECRET MUSEUM OF MANKIND**.

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Simply sign & mail the coupon. Remember, each of the 5 Volumes is 9 1/2 inches high and opened over a foot wide! Remember also that this 5-Volume Set formerly sold for \$10. And it is bound in expensive "life-time" cloth. Don't put this off. Fill out the coupon, drop it in the next mail, and receive this huge work at once.



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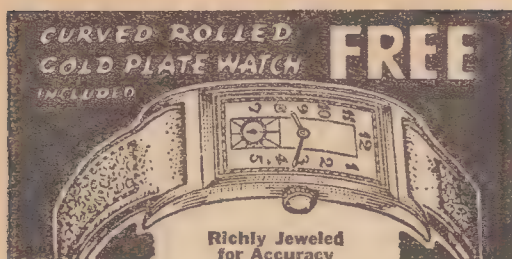
Send me "The Secret Museum of Mankind" (5 large volumes bound together). I will pay postman \$1.98, plus postage on arrival. If not delighted, I will return book in 5 days for full refund of \$1.98. (No foreign orders accepted at this low price!)

Name

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Curved, shockproof rolled gold-plate watch with the color and charm of natural solid yellow gold. **ACCURACY** guaranteed by **MILLION DOLLAR FACTORY** Looks like \$85. **YOU** will like this Gladiator ring and its double head set in lifetime sterling 925/1000 pure—decorated in gold. Why pay \$20?—it is yours for only \$6, and watch is then included **FREE!**



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No red tape. We'll ship at once. Make 2 monthly \$3 payments and the watch is yours! Simply enclose 10 cents for packing, etc. Shipment immediately—by **RETURN MAIL**.

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NEW SCIENTIFIC WONDER

"X-RAY" CURIO

10c
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BOYS

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BIG FUN. You apparently see thru cloth, Wood, Stone, any object. See Bones in Flesh. **FREE PACKAGE** radio picture films, take pictures without camera. 1 package with each 25c order. Not sold elsewhere. Order now! **MARVEL MFG. CO., Dept. 50-C, NEW HAVEN, CONN.**

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NUMBER 512 St. Anthony Street was a large brown residence that sat well back from the street. As the taxi swung into the yard on two wheels, Drake saw with satisfaction that the heavy front door was already open.

"Wait," Drake instructed the driver, and bounded up the steps three at a time, dragging a Colt from his pocket.

He didn't pause at the door, but raced into a room which was large and barren and brown. Gloomy shadows spread over its dank floor. Somewhere in that house was Mael Winters, Jean had told him over the phone. Probably upstairs, he reasoned. But his eyes fell upon two heavy doors on each side of the room, and he moved quickly to them to make certain what was beyond. Both opened into barren and musty rooms.

He stalked rapidly to the stairs. As yet, nothing had attracted his attention. Not a sound had reached his ears. Could Jean have been mistaken?

At the top of the stairs he swung down a wide hall. It was decorated on both sides by doors, some small and some large. The small ones were linen closets, he reasoned. The large ones would open into the rooms.

He moved with caution, his broad shoulders leaning against each door as he listened.

A scream reached his ears, and he swung about. It had apparently come from beyond the door at the far end of the hall. Another scream pierced the heavy air. It was followed by an oath—not of anger, but of pain, and it had a German accent.

"K-14, or I'm a—"

A woman's scream pierced his ear, and its sound charged him into action. He reached the door in a flash and wrenched it open.

Two people fell within his gaze simultaneously. One was Mael Winters, roped to a chair, almost unconscious from pain. There were wounds from a knife on her back and neck.

K-14 was the other, and he, too, was bound to a chair. Sweating, snarling, he pleaded with the men about him for mercy, insisting that the girl had the formula.

"A swell rat, you," Drake grated.

At the first opening of the door, a small Oriental looked up. His eyes were black and malicious and slanting. At the sight of Drake he ducked his head and dived for the nearest window.

There was no time to stop him, but stopped he must be. Drake's Colt lifted and roared. The sound thundered through the building, and the Oriental staggered in his tracks, tried to rise, and crashed against the wall, a .38 bullet in his hip.

"You ought to hang around a while, Jap," Drake grunted.

Then Drake was too busy to see anything but Filipinos. They were small, but they were fast and furious—and there were two of them.

One grappled with him from the front, trying to sink long-nailed fingers into his throat. Drake hurled him away. As the Filipino hit the floor, the knife that he had played upon Mael and K-14 came into action. Drake tried to bring his Colt into play, but was slow. The steel blade left the Filipino's hand with bullet speed, and struck the gun hand. The Colt jumped from his fist and slid across the room, where it lay hidden in a dark corner.

The other brown-skinned Filipino jumped him from behind, digging his knee into the small of Drake's back, and clinging like a leech. Drake spun, tried to dislodge his burden, but failed. The Filipino who had knifed him shuttled into action, struck him below the knees hard and tigerishly. Down he went with a thud. Fingers tore at his throat. He tried to pry them loose, break them, but they were thin bands of steel in strength. He felt his senses reeling. Desperately, he struggled to his knees, but was flattened again as they were pulled from beneath him.

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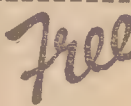
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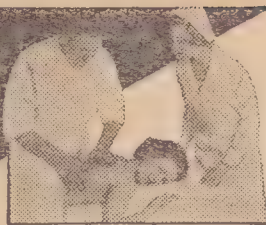
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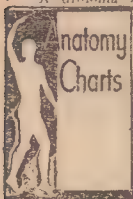
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He dimly realized that Mael was screaming encouragement to him. It brought back his senses for a fleeting instant. Once more he tried to regain his feet, but in vain.

His senses reeled. What would become of Mael, once he was out cold? Those Filipinos would get the formula if they had to torture her all night. Why the devil didn't the police come? He had given himself five minutes; it was now almost ten.

His brain became a riot of thoughts. Mael had called him a genius, because he could think his way out of anything. Well, he had thought her out of jail. He had even thought himself out of it. He had outwitted K-14. But these dumb little Filipinos and that Jap. . . .

Jap! That was it. He forced his blurring eyes to better use. He could see the small faces—evil faces, grinning faces, necks craned under them thin and scrawny.

His fist doubled, but not into a ball. He knew he didn't have the strength to knock them off. It doubled into a thin line of knuckles, fingers barely touching his palm.

Then he punched, snakelike and sharp. A Filipino gave a groan as Drake's fingers struck his throat, knifing his wind. He fell back in horror.

The other Filipino saw what had happened. He ducked his chin to protect his neck. Just in time—just in time to have two straight fingers poke him on each side of his nose, square in the eyes, a sharp poke that burned and blistered, and caused him to release his hold. Two Jap jujitsu tricks! Well, he had thought himself out of that mess, after all!

Then Drake heard a commotion on the stairs. An army might be coming up, from the noise they made. But it was only the *rendör*, as usual too late to be of any service.

QUICKLY and efficiently the police freed Mael Winters and K-14, while Drake rose to his feet and faced the tall, bald-headed man who

appeared to be the *kapitany*. His eyes fell on Jean Kish, anxious and startled. He tossed her a smile. K-14 stood sullen and silent. The wounded Jap had been hauled to his feet, and stood between two stalwart men.

"Better take that Jap down to headquarters," Drake suggested to the *kapitany*.

He paused and turned to the German. "Let us see your passport, Teuton."

K-14 turned white. "Why, you—"

Drake laughed sheepishly, "Enough said!" He turned to the police. "Here is an undesirable citizen without a passport. He sent somebody else back to Holland posing as himself, so that he would have a perfect alibi when he escaped with a Hungarian War Department formula. He had the whole thing worked out pretty well, only he forgot to get the telephone taken out of headquarters!"

"We'll attend to him," the *kapitany* promised, mirthlessly. "Anybody that deals with the War Department in Hungary gets special attention at headquarters."

Crossley muscled into the room now. "How about that story?"

"Too busy now. Got to get this girl down to headquarters to set a prisoner loose, and then take an airplane for England." He swung to Mael. "Got what you came after? Great! Come on, Jean."

"But that story," insisted Crossley.

"Fair enough," Drake returned.

"Here is copy: 'Mr. and Mrs. Otto Krubek announce the birth of a twelve-pound boy. Mother and son are doing nicely—'" He pushed both girls through the door.

"Why, you—" exploded Crossley.

"Go on back to the office. I'll be there in less than twenty minutes. I'll burn that front page right off the paper tonight!"

Crossley gazed at the empty doorway, but he couldn't hold back. "And had you better do it!" he raged. "Brother, I'll say you had!"

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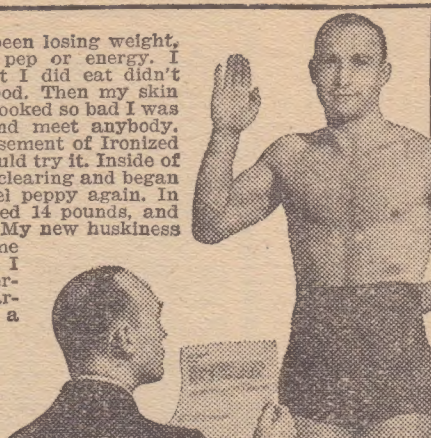
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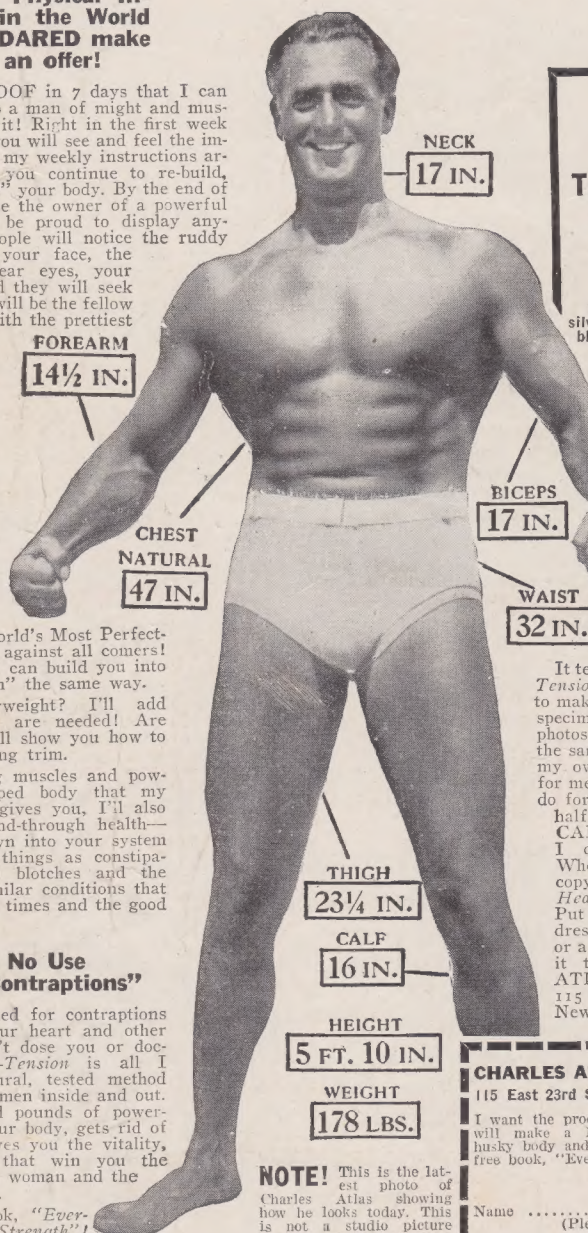
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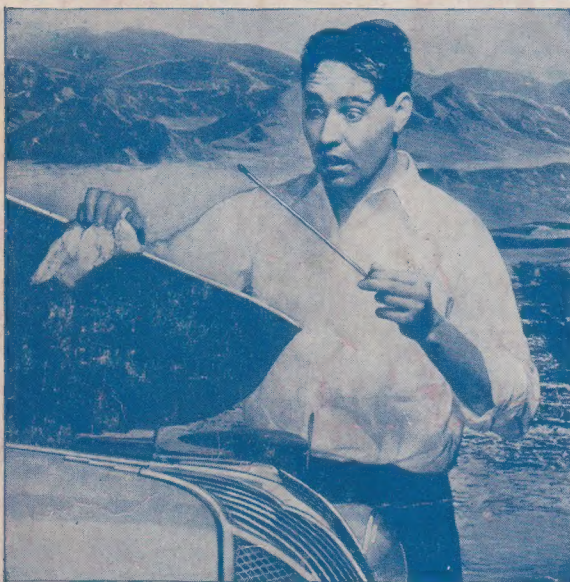
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